

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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CONTENTS

May 26, 1988

	Page
The National Cemetery System	1
OPENING STATEMENTS	
Chairwoman Kaptur.....	
Hon. Dan Burton.....	4
WITNESSES	
Brown, Jerry J., VA/NCBVA Relations Committee, National Concrete Burial Vault Association	18
Prepared statement of Mr. Brown	63
Cullinan, Dennis M., assistant director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.....	15
Prepared statement of Mr. Cullinan	49
Costanzo, Raymond J., superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery	17
Prepared statement of Mr. Costanzo	51
Ebel, Wilfred L., Chief Memorial Affairs Director, Veterans' Administration; accompanied by Arthur S. Hamerschlag, Deputy Director	2
Prepared statement of Mr. Ebel, with attachment.....	27
Johnson, Richard W., Jr., director of legislative affairs, the Non Commissioned Officers Association.....	12
Prepared statement of Mr. Johnson	38
Kirk, Rodney S., assistant director, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, the American Legion.....	14
Prepared statement of Mr. Kirk	45
Schultz, Richard F., associate national legislative director, Disabled American Veterans.....	13
Prepared statement of Mr. Schultz.....	43
Watkins, James E., Jr., past president, American Cemetery Association; accompanied by Stephen L. Morgan, executive vice president.....	20
Prepared statement of Mr. Watkins, Jr.....	65

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 1988

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 240, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Marcy Kaptur (chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Kaptur, Rowland of Georgia, Patterson, Burton, Solomon (ex officio), and Davis.

Also Present: Representative Dornan.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN KAPTUR

Miss KAPTUR. The subcommittee will come to order.

I would like to welcome everyone here this morning as we address the key issues relating to the operation of our Nation's cemetery system. The subcommittee's jurisdiction extends over the national cemetery system administered by the Veterans' Administration, Arlington National Cemetery, which is administered by the Department of the Army, and the overseas cemeteries and memorials maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission. I might parenthetically say we will be at one of those cemeteries in about a week in northern France.

Over 40 percent of the 111 cemeteries in the national cemetery system are closed to new interments. I am deeply concerned, as I know a number of the members of this committee are, about the ability of the system to adequately provide short- and long-term burial benefits for eligible veterans.

I was looking forward to receiving comments from the Veterans' Administration on its policy study, and I must admit that I'm rather disappointed that the study has not yet been forwarded to this subcommittee. I understand that a draft report has been prepared and I hope Mr. Ebel will be kind enough to make a few remarks on its contents during his testimony.

I would also like to hear from witnesses any suggestions they might have on ways to improve cemetery efficiency. We have had testimony in the past from operators of cemeteries at the local level, and I know they have tried to encourage us to find ways to use existing cemeteries, if it would be a veteran's preference to do so, as opposed to the national cemetery system. I think I would appreciate any comments on those linkages as we move forward here. With the peak period of demand for interments rapidly approach-

ing, we must look for innovative ways to improve productivity in whatever ways we can.

Before we move to our first witness, I would just like to say I will leave the record open so that when Mr. Burton or Mr. Solomon come in, we will recognize them for their official comments for the record.

Without further ado, then, I would like to welcome Mr. Wilfred Ebel, who is Chief Memorial Affairs Director at the Veterans' Administration, who is accompanied by Mr. Arthur Hamerschlag, Deputy Director. We welcome you gentlemen here this morning. It's good to have you.

Mr. Ebel, we will just proceed with you. You may either summarize your comments or read them, we will leave it up to you.

STATEMENT OF WILFRED L. EBEL, CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION; ACCOMPANIED BY ARTHUR S. HAMERSCHLAG, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Mr. EBEL. Thank you and good morning, Madam Chairwoman. I am pleased to be here this morning to provide you with an update on the national cemetery system.

I appreciate your acknowledging the presence of Mr. Hamerschlag, the Deputy Chief Memorial Affairs Director. As you are aware, Mr. Hamerschlag provided outstanding leadership in the Department of Memorial Affairs as Acting Chief for a lengthy period prior to my arrival at the VA.

Miss KAPTUR. And he did a fine job, we agree.

Mr. EBEL. With your permission, I would like to make a brief oral statement and then ask that my written testimony be accepted for the record.

Miss KAPTUR. We have probably eight minutes here before I have to recess the hearing briefly to run across the street and vote.

Mr. EBEL. First I would like to express my personal appreciation for the subcommittee's leadership toward the establishment of a memorial and museum commemorating U.S. participation in World War II. I would also like to express both my personal and official appreciation for those memorial affairs provisions that were contained in the recently-enacted omnibus bill.

This summer marks the 15th year since Congress established a national cemetery system. The number of cemeteries has continued to grow, and we will be dedicating the 112th this weekend in Florida. We expect to open the 113th in northern California in 1991.

Our workload has also grown significantly. Interments have increased by 50 percent, from 36,000 in 1973 to a projected 55,000 this year. The demand for service is expected to continue increasing and will peak around the year 2010.

In January of this year, merchant mariners who had served in oceangoing vessels during World War II were made eligible to receive VA benefits. The first interment was made at Calverton National Cemetery on February 4.

Our headstone and marker program has also experienced significant workload growth. In 1973, the VA furnished 190,000 markers. In fiscal year 1987, we were up to 253,000. Last year DMA reported that we were working on a serious backlog in this program. I am

happy to tell you that we are now back on track, that the applications processing has been successfully automated. Our internal time needed to handle the applications has been reduced from 30 days last September to 10 days in March of this year. In addition, the error rate has been reduced from 0.9 percent last year to 0.5 percent for the first half of this year.

Interest in the State Cemetery Grants Program continues. We just recently awarded a grant to Hawaii for improvement of an existing cemetery, and several more requests are pending. This program is authorized on a five-year basis, and that authorization will expire in September, 1989. I would urge the subcommittee to consider renewing authorization for another five years.

Madam Chairwoman, you specifically requested information on a policy for the future development of the national cemetery system. This study was one of the recommendations made in our 1987 study. The policy study is still in draft form and we will be forwarding a copy to you as soon as the study is completed.

I might point out that we're looking here at major policy and resource implications, so the study will be referred to OMB as part of developing an administration position. But let me assure you that we are getting all reasonable alternatives into the study for everyone to look at. I certainly will keep you informed.

Meanwhile, there are several additional initiatives that we have undertaken to provide additional land for the national cemetery system. Congress was good enough to authorize the transfer of adjacent Army property at Fort Sam Houston and Rock Island National Cemeteries. We have some very generous groups in the private sector, and we have also had some good support from the local government sectors in working to donate land at Little Rock, at Fort Smith, at Santa Fe, and at the Fort Bayard National Cemetery. This has proven to be a very positive way for us to keep cemeteries open. We are also looking at the possibility of purchasing some land to maintain operations at the very busy Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, OR.

We are actively engaged in preserving an important part of our Nation's history. For example, next month the United States and Canada will cosponsor a repatriation ceremony for the remains of a group of unknown American soldiers from the War of 1812. Those remains were recently discovered at Fort Erie in Ontario Province and they will be ceremoniously transferred from Canada to the United States and then re-interred with full military honors at the Bath National Cemetery in New York State.

I would like to conclude these brief remarks by referring to the DMA Credo. This is a new statement of an enduring concept. I believe this credo helps our employees and the public understand what the national cemetery system is and should be, and the level of personal commitment which those of us who are responsible for the system must make in order to achieve these goals. With your permission, I would request that the credo which accompanies my formal statement be entered for the record.

Miss KAPTUR. Without objection, we will do so.

Mr. EBEL. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I would be happy to respond to questions.

[The statement of Wilfred L. Ebel, with attachment, appears at p.27.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Ebel.

I thought we might get a couple of questions in here before we leave to vote.

The first one is, I am very interested in the fact that we are going to have an increasing number of interments at our cemeteries. Obviously, though, there is different pressure. You mentioned Portland, OR, I believe in your statement. I don't really know why there is so much pressure in Portland, OR, for burials. Maybe you could explain that to us. But does the demand vary depending on the part of the country that you're in?

Mr. EBEL. It varies very much by the part of the country, and then, of course, one of the more important aspects is the nearness of the cemetery to an urban population.

The Willamette Cemetery has an extraordinary amount of support from the public, not just from patriotic veterans groups but from garden clubs, the community colleges, the four-year colleges. They're all actively involved at the cemetery. I think that is one of the reasons why it is such a busy place.

Miss KAPTUR. Mr. Ebel, I want to just say that the questions I will have when I return will have to do with the future goals for the national cemetery system, what we should really be thinking about, any cooperation with the private sector, if at all, the possibility of future locations being adjacent to national parks, and I also have some questions about grave liners, and also the environmental impact statement in four communities. So you might just be thinking about that. You probably anticipated those anyway.

We will recess for a few moments until we go and vote.

[Whereupon, the subcommittee was in recess.]

Miss KAPTUR. I would like to reconvene the hearing, please. We appreciate your kindness in waiting for us.

I wanted to ask Mr. Burton, the ranking minority member here, if he would like to make a statement for the record.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAN BURTON

Mr. BURTON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Good morning. We meet today to discuss the national cemetery system. We will hear testimony from a distinguished panel, of course, and we will consider the present and future condition of the system.

One-hundred and eleven cemeteries currently operate under the VA auspices. The yearly number of interments continues to rise. It is currently more than 50,000 a year. Can our present system meet these needs? Over the long run, the answer is clearly no. Those who are, in principle, opposed to the expansion of the cemetery system ignore the basic fact that the need exists and will have to be addressed. Benign neglect will not solve the problem. In this context, I call on the VA to proceed with their environmental impact statements.

I take second place to no one when it comes to awareness of the budget constraints we face and will continue to face. When resources are scarce, a sober assessment and evaluation of spending

priorities is all the more critical. We must start from the premise that a problem is emerging and we need to attack it now or face the consequences later. It's early in the game. Let us pledge ourselves now to a clear-headed, long range planning strategy. Let us determine what our requirements are and what options we have for meeting them.

The need for cemeteries is a somber fact of life. We are here to discuss the burial of the veterans of our Nation's Armed Forces. We honor these men as they lay in their eternal resting places, just as they honored America during their lives with their selfless devotion. I look forward to hearing from our panelists today and, as always, I look forward to working with you, Madam Chairwoman.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Burton. It is an equal pleasure for me to work with you. We have been able to accomplish a lot together on this subcommittee.

Mr. Ebel, we were talking about the future direction of the national cemetery system, the old concept of regional cemeteries and so forth. The last one was dedicated and opened, and now we're moving into a new era in the cemetery system itself. I wanted you to talk a little bit about that.

You mentioned the Portland cemetery where, because of the way it is constructed, its proximity to a large population, it is working very well. I have visited some of the regional cemeteries and, frankly, I wonder if they will ever be filled to capacity. I wanted to have you talk a little bit about the future. What really is the next step? How is your study going?

There are at least four environmental impact statements underway, and I am particularly interested in the one in the Cleveland area, but I think other Members may be interested in some in other areas—I know Mr. Davis has a particular concern. Let's talk about some of the policy directions in which we're headed here. What is the next phase for this system? We have empty cemeteries in some places, filled cemeteries in others. We have States that want to give us land, Members that want cemeteries. I mean, where are we really headed?

Mr. EBEL. I think, Madam Chairwoman, when you talk about those cemeteries which are not experiencing very much growth, that points up the very importance of the EIS process, in which you do get into the demographics and try to make certain that a national cemetery is located in an area where it will serve the maximum number of veterans. That's really a very important part of the EIS.

As you know, the study that was submitted in 1987 indicated the ten regions of the country in which there was the most perceived need if the national cemetery system were to be expanded. All four of the EISs that you mentioned are on the list of the ten geographic areas of the country with greatest need.

Miss KAPTUR. How do you best propose to meet those needs in the areas that you have identified? The national cemetery directors came in to me and said—not the government ones but the private sector—and they said, "Marcy, the way you meet the need is just set aside areas in existing cemeteries, in communities that have veterans. You have a veterans' section, or you permit the veteran to be buried next to his or her relatives."

What options are you looking at?

Mr. EBEL. I think if you want to assure that a veteran's gravesite is going to be properly maintained in perpetuity, then I think it need not be in a section of a private or denominational cemetery, but it would be either a national cemetery or a State veterans cemetery.

Miss KAPTUR. I have several other questions but I would like to give the other Members a chance to comment.

Mr. Rowland, did you have questions this morning?

Dr. ROWLAND OF GEORGIA. I don't have any.

Miss KAPTUR. You do not. Okay.

Mr. Solomon?

Mr. SOLOMON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

First of all, I am not an official member of this subcommittee, but—

Miss KAPTUR. We welcome you.

Mr. SOLOMON [Continuing.] But it's nice to be here and it's nice to commend you and Dan Burton for the excellent job that you do with this subcommittee. I would like to also thank Wil Ebel for the outstanding job that he and his agency does.

I have a couple of questions about the four proposed cemeteries that Marcy Kaptur mentioned, in Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle and Albany. What is the procedure in this regard, once the money has been appropriated as it has been for these four, where there really is a severe need right now for those cemeteries to go on line? What happens once this money is appropriated, Will?

Mr. EBEL. We have gone to work immediately and we have been proceeding with the preliminaries to an EIS. That is a gathering of demographic data and the appointment of site selection boards for each of the four EISs. But as you may be aware, OMB has suggested that these might be categorized as lower priority projects. If the administration does make that kind of determination, we at DMA would then be coming back to Congress and requesting a reprogramming of those funds probably into minor construction projects.

Mr. SOLOMON. Well, Will, I just want to tell you that when the Veterans' Administration came up with the study which pointed out the ten neediest areas of the country, this subcommittee and this full committee, working with the Veterans' Administration, made the determination that we agreed with that study that you people had made, and we determined that these four were the neediest of the ten. I, for one, resent the Office of Management and Budget legislating after we have already done this. I don't want to see them reprioritize the standings for these cemeteries. There is a need, they must go on, and I don't want to see them taking the part of the authorizing committee. So I'm going to be talking with you at length, as well as with Mr. Turnage and Mr. Miller, because we want these cemeteries to go on line as soon as possible.

I will be discussing with you the timetable of how this will proceed, because we don't want to fall behind. You know, the challenge of the aging veterans population that we have in this country is a severe one. We all know the problems that it is creating, not only for the live veteran population in geriatrics today, but those that are, of course, expected to pass on. We can't neglect those vet-

erans or those families. So let's keep that in mind and we'll be working together with Marcy and Dan Burton on it.

Thank you.

Mr. EBEL. I understand.

Miss KAPTUR. Mr. Solomon, I did want to follow up on your mention of the term "timetable". What is the projected timetable, just ballpark, of the completion of these studies, OMB clearance, and your recommendations to us? What are we really looking at here, and the cemeteries opening, assuming we were to approve them all?

Mr. EBEL. Well, I guess you would look at something in the neighborhood of 20 months for the completion of an EIS. In the opening of a cemetery—

Miss KAPTUR. Excuse me, Mr. Ebel. Twenty months being completed when? You're saying these haven't started at all.

Mr. EBEL. Well, we have done some preliminary work, such as site selection boards. But I would look at 20 months from today being an outside date, unless there is a problem with a reprogramming request coming forward, which I assume Congress would act on quickly.

Miss KAPTUR. I think Mr. Solomon wanted to follow up on that.

Mr. SOLOMON. If you would yield, Marcy, I would just like to say that I have discussed this with Sonny Montgomery, as well as the Chairwoman and ranking member here, and I have also discussed it with the appropriations subcommittee, Mr. Boland and Mr. Green, and there is absolutely no chance that a reprogramming request is going to go through. So that's the message we give to you: Let's keep this thing on line with what Marcy is talking about because you "ain't" going to get reprogramming.

Thank you.

Miss KAPTUR. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. EBEL. Thank you.

If I may add to that, then, following completion of an EIS, as we are doing now in the northern California cemetery, which we just recently began work on, we will have that on a fast track construction schedule in anticipation of being able to open that by April of 1991. If we can do the California cemetery on a fast track basis, then I would expect that any other cemetery that Congress appropriated funds for we would also have those on a fast track and be able to do them within three years from the EIS.

Miss KAPTUR. Does that include Cleveland?

Mr. EBEL. That includes Cleveland, yes.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you.

I apologize to Mr. Burton for not recognizing him first here in questioning.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you very much.

In a statement made by Raymond Costanzo, the superintendent of the Arlington National Cemetery, on May 26, he indicated that there's a new visitors center being constructed at the Arlington National Cemetery, which is good, but he says on page 13, "With the opening of this new facility, a paid parking system will be initiated."

Do you have any idea how much in the way of revenues are going to be generated from that parking?

Mr. EBEL. I'm sorry, I can't comment on that because the Arlington National Cemetery is under the Department of the Army. I think Mr. Costanzo may be here today. I don't know whether he would be prepared to comment or not.

Mr. BURTON. I understand he is appearing later as a witness, so I will reserve my question for him.

I don't know whether this falls under your jurisdiction or not, but I received a complaint from one of my constituents some time ago about the annex at the Gettysburg National Cemetery. He had gone out to visit the gravesite of his son and it was overgrown with weeds and in a deplorable condition. We called and asked the Veterans' Administration to check into it, and they said it was not under their jurisdiction but under some other agency—I can't recall exactly what it was at the time.

Mr. EBEL. That would be under the National Park Service.

Mr. BURTON. Under the National Park Service. They were checking on it, and I did talk to the head of the National Park Service. As I recall, they were supposed to get back to me.

Do you work with them?

Mr. EBEL. Yes, sir, we do. One of the Associate Directors of the National Park Service, Mr. Jerry Rogers, was appointed last year as a member of our National Advisory Committee on Cemeteries.

Mr. BURTON. Do you communicate with him on a regular basis?

Mr. EBEL. Yes, sir.

Mr. BURTON. Would you tell him that I would really appreciate a report on that Gettysburg annex, because if it's in the kind of condition that was reported to me, it needs to be corrected post haste. There were weeds over the graves and the parents of the young men who died and were buried there, some of them were in tears when they saw the condition of it. I just think, out of respect for those who died and are buried in those cemeteries, we ought to make sure they're in very good condition. He said it was deplorable.

So they were checking on it. I don't know what the disposition of it is, but if you could get back in touch with me, or have them get in touch with me, I would appreciate it.

Mr. EBEL. I will attempt to contact Mr. Rogers later today, sir.

Mr. BURTON. Okay. It was the Gettysburg annex.

Miss KAPTUR. Do I understand, then, that the actual maintenance is under the jurisdiction not of the Veterans' Administration but of the Department of Interior?

Mr. BURTON. That's what was reported to me, Madam Chairwoman.

Mr. EBEL. Yes.

Miss KAPTUR. That's interesting.

I know one of my questions all along has been whether or not, as we do these environmental impact statements and select sites for new veterans cemeteries, whether they can be located adjacent to national parklands or Department of Interior sites—not that they would have actual responsibility for maintenance, but just the development of the complex might be very nice.

Could you comment on that, Mr. Ebel?

Mr. EBEL. Yes. Let me say that in every speech that I have made since assuming this position, I have told every audience that I want

every cemetery to be a memorial park in the true sense of those two words. Because I believe that a cemetery is a place for the living as well as for the deceased, that it's a place for rejoicing as well as for grieving. So I would be very amenable to having a national cemetery adjacent to a national park or a State-owned park.

However, there is always the overriding requirement that the cemetery be so located as to serve the maximum number of veterans. But I certainly can't think of a better neighbor for a national cemetery than a national park.

Miss KAPTUR. We're really glad to have your sensitivity on that. I think Mr. Burton wanted to ask an additional question.

Mr. BURTON. I was just reminded that we're going to be celebrating Memorial Day very quickly, and normally the condition of all the cemeteries is excellent at that time. Is that going to be the case this year?

Mr. EBEL. That's every indication I have had in talking to our area offices, as well as some of the individual cemetery directors. We have, of course, emphasized that in our communications to all the cemeteries in the past several weeks. We expect to have some very large attendance at some of our Memorial Day ceremonies this year.

Mr. BURTON. I'm happy to hear that.

I just received notification on what has happened at the Gettysburg annex cemetery. It was reported to me just now that they need more than \$500,000 for improvements there, and they were passed over for funding.

Does that mean, then, that the deplorable condition at that annex will continue?

Mr. EBEL. I'm afraid I cannot comment on that because that would come under the Interior Department, sir.

Mr. BURTON. That's a sad state of affairs. We ought to check on that and find out what the problem is.

Miss KAPTUR. We should check with the Appropriations Committee or Interior. We'll help on that, Dan.

I think Dr. Rowland does have some comments.

Dr. ROWLAND OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

I just wanted to say that I think cemeteries are memorials, too, as was indicated here. I had a chance to see only a couple out of the country, the Punchbowl in Honolulu and the American cemetery in the Philippines, both of which are outstanding memorials to the veterans of this country and to those people who have given their lives in defense of this country.

I regret that I won't be able to go to Normandy, where we have a large cemetery that many Americans are buried at. I want to commend you for going there and looking at that. I wish I could participate in that trip.

I agree very much with the fact that we need to preserve these cemeteries as national memorials and continue to ensure that they are there for the citizens of this country to see and to visit. It is for the living as well as the dead. I appreciate the comments you made.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Dr. Rowland.

Mr. Davis, it's Chicago's time.

Mr. DAVIS. Great. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

I wish Congressman Solomon would be a little more definitive in his remarks.

[Laughter.]

Of course, I associate myself with that positive attitude that he has.

Mr. Ebel, I want to commend you for your service as Director and for your advocacy of the system, and in particular throw a kudos to your Deputy Director, Art Hamerschlag, who I think is a marvelous functionary for the national cemetery system.

We have just got to reverse this. There isn't going to be any re-programming, there's no doubt about that. Congressman Solomon was absolutely correct.

When Art was out in my area, and the chairwoman was kind enough to have some hearings there, we discussed with the VA at that point a timetable. I must admit I was somewhat dismayed. I thought the process was a little swifter than it was, and I was a little bit dismayed. In fact, I recall making the comment to Art that I didn't want to be the first one in the cemetery in Chicago as a permanent resident, and we have got to move that up a little bit.

Actually, I was astonished again, being a freshman in the congressional halls, with the inordinate amount of time it takes sometimes to get things done. But I fully understand that now, having had it "splained to me," as we say back home, about the safeguards that are necessary to create not just a cemetery but a shrine. That's what this is all about, and that's why, when we get to Mr. Costanzo, we're going to talk about not having to charge people to go to a public shrine, which I think is a great travesty.

I just thank you again. I'm sure we will be back to you, having dialogues on the EIS problem that we have, and certainly Mr. Miller will see the error of his ways as we go through the process.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Davis.

Mr. Ebel, you mentioned there is a study being conducted on grave liners. What is the preliminary data on completion of that? We would certainly be interested in seeing a copy of it.

Mr. EBEL. I would hope that we would have the study completed by this fall, probably by October. As you know, we are now using grave liners at Calverton and Riverside and Massachusetts. We used about 11,000 grave liners last year. When we dedicate the cemetery in Florida this weekend, we will then be using grave liners there.

I would hope that we can begin using grave liners at additional cemeteries, and I would propose to select the cemeteries on the need, on the soil conditions, and as we open a new section in a cemetery. We are making plans towards that end right now and we will be looking in the areas where we will be using grave liners to soliciting bids to purchase grave liners in bulk and hope that we can acquire grave liners at a very reasonable cost.

Miss KAPTUR. Mr. Ebel, of the veterans who choose to be buried in the national cemetery system, if you were to characterize them, do they differ from veterans who choose to be buried in private cemeteries or local municipal cemeteries? What are the character-

istics of veterans who choose to be buried in the national cemeteries?

Mr. EBEL. I think, Madam Chairwoman, the real characteristic is demographics, particularly the veteran that lives within 50 miles of a national cemetery, which then means that the family is able to reach the gravesite within an hour. There are some indications of the use of a cemetery by families that are burying a loved one that's maybe as much as 100 miles from a national cemetery. But if we look at any other aspects, I really don't see any factors there.

Miss KAPTUR. Could you also tell me if you do intend to provide grave liners for all future interments?

Mr. EBEL. Well, I will have to wait until the study is completed in October.

Now, there are really three issues there. There is the cost effectiveness of it. In an earlier study that we did, it indicated that it would, in fact, be cost effective to use grave liners. I believe a study that was conducted a few years ago at Arlington National Cemetery indicated the same thing. But if you look at cost effectiveness over a 20-year period—and some people don't like to measure cost effectiveness unless it comes maybe within a five-year period—I think within a 20-year period, it is very clear that the use of grave liners is cost effective.

There are a couple of other issues there that I consider very important, and one of those is esthetics, because a cemetery in which grave liners are used, the ground is going to be much more even. It's going to be a more park-like setting, and you avoid the sunken graves.

Then a third issue, of course, is the safety factor. If you have undulating ground because of some sinkage for failure to use grave liners, it could present a safety factor, particularly for an older person that was trying to visit a gravesite.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you very much.

Are there any other questions from other members? Mr. Burton.

Mr. BURTON. I have one real quick question. Getting back to this Gettysburg issue, because I want to have some ammunition when I talk to them, what do the grave liners cost?

Mr. EBEL. The average that we paid last year for grave liners was about \$87.

Mr. BURTON. For each one?

Mr. EBEL. For each one.

Mr. BURTON. And you purchased how many?

Mr. EBEL. We spent just about a million dollars last year. We purchased just short of 11,000.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you very much.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Burton.

I would like to thank both of you gentlemen for being with us this morning and for your willingness to work with this subcommittee. We commend you for your fine work and for the vision that I hear expressed in your comments this morning. We look forward to working with you, and we hope for many years to come.

Mr. EBEL. Thank you.

Miss KAPTUR. I would like to call the next panel, please, and I appreciate their waiting. Mr. Johnson, director of legislative affairs of The Non Commissioned Officers Association; Mr. Richard

Schultz, associate national legislative director, Disabled American Veterans; Mr. Rodney S. Kirk, assistant director, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, the American Legion; and finally, Mr. Dennis Cullinan, assistant director, National Legislative Service, the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

We welcome you gentlemen this morning. We will take you in the order in which you are listed on the agenda. Mr. Johnson, that means you're first.

STATEMENTS OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR., DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, THE NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION; RICHARD F. SCHULTZ, ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS; RODNEY S. KIRK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION, THE AMERICAN LEGION; AND DENNIS M. CULLINAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

STATEMENT OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I will attempt to limit my remarks and be very brief this morning, since much of our concern has already been addressed by the committee.

Miss KAPTUR. We would appreciate that, in view of the time.

Mr. JOHNSON. Twenty-one of 65 cemeteries are scheduled to close between now and the year 2000, and the Veterans' Administration will close another 15 between the year 2000 and 2020. As a result, only about five will be replaced. The cemetery system is going to suffer a net loss of 31 cemeteries in the next 33 years.

Now, the outgrowth of that in accessibility for veterans will drop from over 60 percent, within the current measure of 100 miles, to less than 49 percent, and less than 35 percent as a result of these closures will live within 50 miles of a national cemetery. As the Director just noted, proximity to a national cemetery is the greatest factor in participation in that system.

Ten cemeteries in major population centers would bring 90 percent of all veterans in this Nation to within 100 miles of national cemeteries. The addition of ten cemeteries in major population centers would bring nearly 70 percent to within 50 miles of a national cemetery.

As we know, Public Law 99-576 authorized the Administrator to begin acquisition planning for the creation of these ten cemeteries, but the Veterans' Administration, the Office of Management and Budget in particular, has been reluctant to change cemetery policy and they continue to cling to the regional cemetery concept as the only place for expansion of the cemetery system through the next century.

Our only recommendation with regard to this is to go ahead with the environmental impact statements, the acquisition and so forth, for the four cemeteries currently under consideration, and the expansion into that full list of ten cemeteries, we believe the Congress is going to have to direct that action instead of simply authorizing it, as was done in Public Law 99-576.

Turning to the two other issues of concern to the Association this morning, in 1923 the American Battle Monuments Commission was founded by public law and since that time it has done yeoman's work in preserving the dignity and honor of service in the Armed Forces and, as they are manifested, American battle monuments and cemeteries overseas. We certainly commend that.

But when that law was written in 1923, the participation of enlisted service members on the Commission was precluded. The law provided only that commissioned officers of the Armed Forces may participate as members of the American Battle Monuments Commission. And while that might have been acceptable for the times, we think that has grown somewhat archaic over the years. We would ask this committee to look at a small change in title 36, section 121, which would simply authorize noncommissioned and petty officers, enlisted members of the Armed Forces, to be appointed to the American Battle Monuments Commission so that they might serve in this capacity also.

Finally, we implore the committee to take another look at H.R. 1987, a bill to name that area of Arlington National Cemetery as the Tomb of the Unknowns. This is an issue which has been harped on, has been walked around and stepped on for some 50 years now. Certainly there must be some accommodation that can be reached to get that legislation moving again. Whether it designates the name as the Tomb of the Unknowns or something felt more appropriate by the committee, we urge this committee to move that legislation so that we might have an appropriate name for that national monument by Veterans Day this year.

That concludes my remarks.

[The statement of Richard Johnson, Jr. appears at p. 38.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

On that last point, I would hope that you might communicate that to the full committee and our chairman. Our subcommittee has taken action on that issue and we really would like to move that along. So that might be a good point of communication.

Mr. Schultz.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD F. SCHULTZ

Mr. SCHULTZ. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and members of the subcommittee. On behalf of the more than one million members of the Disabled American Veterans, I wish to say how much we appreciate the opportunity to appear here today to express our views relative to the VA's national cemetery system.

At the outset, Madam Chairwoman, the DAV wishes to commend you on the timely exercise of your oversight responsibilities, as clearly the efforts of this subcommittee over the years have had a positive impact on the operation of the national cemetery system.

Madam Chairwoman, as you are aware, by the year 2020 more than half of our Nation's veteran population will reside more than 100 miles from an open national cemetery. In addressing this issue of providing reasonable access to gravesites for our Nation's veteran population, our national convention delegates adopted a resolution which calls for the ultimate goal of providing at least one open national cemetery in each State. Such a policy we believe will pro-

vide a final resting place relatively close to a veteran's home and family.

As you know, even though grave liners have proven to be cost effective in reducing maintenance and repair costs, currently the VA only uses them at three national cemeteries. We are encouraged, however, to note that H.R. 2616, recently signed into law by the President, will permit the VA to use grave liners in any national cemetery. However, we are concerned that since this legislation does not require the VA to use grave liners, it may have little effect on the current limited use of grave liners in national cemeteries.

In reference to grave markers, Madam Chairwoman, the DAV has expressed our views concerning the use of upright or flat grave markers. It is our opinion and our belief that, when possible, veterans and their families should have a choice as to the type of grave marker they want. Possibly as new cemeteries are constructed, or additional existing cemeteries are expanded, consideration could be given to setting aside a place in these cemeteries for upright and flat grave markers.

This concludes my statement. Again, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to express our views here today.

[The statement of Richard F. Schultz appears at p. 43.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Schultz, very much.

Mr. Kirk.

STATEMENT OF RODNEY S. KIRK

Mr. KIRK. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. The American Legion certainly appreciates this opportunity to appear before the subcommittee this morning to express our views on the national cemetery system.

I have only a few brief remarks to make at this time. We have submitted within our formal statement our noted concerns pertaining to the need for additional resources within DMA. As clearly indicated by demographics, past and projected workloads, and other related factors, the DMA workload continues to significantly expand while increases in supporting personnel have not kept pace.

The American Legion is also awaiting the release of the proposed policy relating to the future physical development of the national cemetery system. As noted earlier, this policy, which was outlined in chapter 9 of VA's report on the national cemetery system, has not yet been decided. We would urge this subcommittee to continue its oversight until this policy is released.

In closing, Madam Chairwoman, the American Legion would like to commend you and members of this subcommittee for your efforts in the formulation and passage of H.R. 2616, now Public Law 100-322. Once again, your vital role clearly demonstrates your commitment to this Nation's veterans. For that, The American Legion thanks you.

[The statement of Rodney S. Kirk appears at p. 45.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Kirk.

Finally. Mr. Cullinan.

STATEMENT OF DENNIS M. CULLINAN

Mr. CULLINAN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. The VFW also very much appreciates being given this opportunity to express our views on the national cemetery system.

For a number of years we have been mandated by resolution to seek the establishment of an open national cemetery in every State. Because a great number of national cemeteries are now closed, the survivors of eligible veterans are forced to either seek the veteran's internment far from home, or through other sources, generally at greater expense. We believe that providing a national cemetery in every State is an important responsibility of the Federal Government.

In responding to the challenge of providing an open national cemetery system, the VA has established a national cemetery in each of ten standard Federal regions, plus one near Washington, D.C. While the VA must be commended for taking action to address the ever-increasing demand, we do not believe the regional cemeteries objective has been successful. The survivors of veterans should not be required to travel great distances, particularly at this most grievous period.

It is our understanding the VA is also in the process of establishing one national cemetery in each of the ten most populated cities in the United States. We believe, when completed, this action will certainly help to reduce the burden of the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs and at the same time provide an open national cemetery in close proximity to the greatest number of veterans.

Madam Chairwoman, at this time I would like to address another program which the VFW wholeheartedly supports: the State Cemetery Grant Program. This program, enacted in 1978, authorized the Administrator to provide a matching fund grant-in-aid program for establishing, expanding or improving veterans cemeteries owned and operated by the State. We firmly believe this program complements the national cemetery system and would encourage individual States to take advantage of it. We also strongly support legislation to extend this valuable program, inasmuch as it is due to expire at the end of fiscal year 1989.

Finally, the voting delegates to our most recent national convention also passed several resolutions addressing the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs. The VFW supports restoring the burial allowance for all wartime veterans, making the plot allowance available to all veterans, and increasing the plot allowance from \$150 to \$250. Copies of these resolutions are appended to the statement.

In closing, I would also like to mention the VFW's support of formally naming the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

[The statement of Dennis M. Cullinan appears at p. 49.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you very much. That has been an interesting observation during all of your testimonies and we intend to try to jog the full committee. We've been talking about that up here this morning.

I did want to mention that the committee has been very much in support of the State Cemetery Grant Program and will continue to

do so. I also wanted to mention to Mr. Schultz that when the question of flat versus upright grave markers cleared the House of Representatives, we did offer a choice. It was deleted on the other side. So we are aware of your concerns in that regard.

Do any members of the committee have questions of our witnesses this morning?

Mr. BURTON. I just have one real quick question.

One of the bones of contention, I guess, with the Tomb of the Unknowns was a number of members of the full committee thought there should be some mention of the United States armed services. In fact, I was the one who broached that subject—I think it carried unanimously by the committee initially—that across the top of the tomb it should say “United States Armed Services Tomb of the Unknowns”, so that there was some reference to the military service that we were talking about with this tomb. Tomb of the Unknowns doesn’t say anything about the military aspects of the person or persons buried there. We thought there should be some reference made to the service rendered to the country as a member of the armed services.

I just wonder, do any of you have a problem with that, “United States Armed Forces Tomb of the Unknowns”?

Mr. SCHULTZ. No, Mr. Burton. We certainly in the DAV would have no objections to that, or no problem with it.

Mr. BURTON. Do any of you have objections with that? It would still say Tomb of the Unknowns, but across the top it would say United States Armed Forces Tomb of the Unknowns.

Mr. JOHNSON. No, we wouldn’t have any problem with that, Mr. Burton, although it is rather manifest by its location in Arlington Cemetery.

Mr. BURTON. I do understand that. But you never know what it’s going to be like 100, 150 years from now. I think inscribed upon that memorial there ought to be a reference to the United States Armed Forces because that’s what it’s all about.

Is there a problem with that?

Mr. CULLINAN. The VFW wouldn’t have a problem with that. Our thinking had been along the same line, that it was somehow implied by its location, and also the fact that through the years it was called Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Mr. BURTON. You see, “soldier” has a military reference.

Mr. CULLINAN. Right, and we thought Tomb of the Unknowns to be somewhat closer to its common public description. But we wouldn’t have a problem.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you very much.

Mr. Davis or Mr. Dornan?

Mr. DAVIS. No questions.

Miss KAPTUR. All right. I want to thank you gentlemen for always being with us and for your excellent testimony this morning.

Our final witnesses this morning will be Mr. Raymond Costanzo, superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery; Mr. Jerry J. Brown, National Concrete Burial Vault Association; and Mr. James E. Watkins, Jr., Past President of the American Cemetery Associa-

tion, accompanied by Mr. Stephen Morgan, Executive Vice President. We welcome you gentlemen and thank you for waiting.

In view of the time, if you want to summarize your testimony, we will put your complete remarks into the record. I will begin with Mr. Costanzo.

STATEMENTS OF RAYMOND J. COSTANZO, SUPERINTENDENT, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY; JERRY J. BROWN, VA/NCBVA RELATIONS COMMITTEE, NATIONAL CONCRETE BURIAL VAULT ASSOCIATION; AND JAMES E. WATKINS, JR., PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION; ACCOMPANIED BY STEPHEN L. MORGAN, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

STATEMENT OF RAYMOND J. COSTANZO

Mr. COSTANZO. Madam Chairwoman, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am Ray Costanzo, Superintendent of the Arlington National Cemetery, and I am appearing on behalf of the Secretary of the Army who is responsible for the operations of Arlington National Cemetery.

Madam Chairwoman, with your approval, I will summarize my report and submit the full report for the record.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you.

Mr. COSTANZO. From its origin during the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has become a great national and military shrine. This 1,100 acre estate, which comprises Arlington National Cemetery and the Fort Myer military reservation, has a rich, historical background. It became the property of John Parke Custis in 1778 and descended to his son, George Washington Parke Custis, who built the handsome Greek revival mansion, now known as Arlington House. The house and grounds were owned by the Robert E. Lee family at the outbreak of the Civil War, when the house was taken over by the government for military purposes.

The establishment of the cemetery dates back to 1864. Over the years, representatives of all the Nation's wars and conflicts have been buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Common among the memorials in Arlington National Cemetery are the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater and the tomb where the remains of unknowns from World War I, Korea, World War II, and the Vietnam era are interred.

The tomb is a hallowed and cherished shrine. Placement of wreaths by veterans organizations, foreign dignitaries, and representatives of schools, religious groups and civil and fraternal organizations has become a tribute of respect of all our Nation's heroes.

Arlington is also the final resting place of two former Presidents, President Taft and President Kennedy.

The unique nature of Arlington National Cemetery as a national as well as a military shrine is well-recognized. At the close of fiscal year 1987, the remains of 206,065 persons were interred and inurned in the cemetery. Of this total, 199,025 persons were interred and 7,040 remains were inurned in the columbarium. In fiscal year 1987, services were conducted for 4,040 persons, which included 83 general and flag officers. In fiscal year 1988 and 1989, burials and inurnments are projected to be 4,320 and 4,470, respectively. Approximately 16 interments are accomplished daily. At the present

rate of burial, it is projected the cemetery will not be filled until approximately the year 2020.

The second 5,000 niche unit of the columbarium was opened in April, 1986 to accommodate the inurnment of cremated remains of honorably discharged veterans. Design funds for the next 10,000 niche increment were requested in fiscal year 1988 and construction funds have been requested for fiscal year 1989.

Construction of a new visitors center and parking facility began in late 1986. These new facilities, much needed to better serve the visiting public and, at the same time, reducing interference with funeral services, are scheduled for completion in the fall of 1988.

With the opening of this new facility, a paid parking system will be initiated. Under this plan, all persons utilizing the parking facility will be charged a nominal parking fee. All funds received from this operation will be returned to the United States Treasury to pay back the cost of construction. Friends and relatives desiring to visit their loved ones gravesites will not be required to pay any fees.

In addition to its principal function as a national cemetery, Arlington is the site of many nonfuneral ceremonies each year. In fiscal year 1987, 2,163 such ceremonies were conducted. A like number of ceremonies is anticipated for fiscal year 1988 and 1989. The President of the United States, ten foreign heads of state, governors and other high-ranking military and political officials participated in these ceremonies in fiscal year 1987.

Arlington National Cemetery has approximately 4 million visitors annually and is one of the most visited sites in the National Capitol Region.

Madam Chairwoman, this concludes my remarks. I will be pleased to respond to your questions at this time.

[The statement of Raymond J. Costanzo appears at p. 51.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Costanzo.

We will proceed with the witnesses and hold questions until we're all completed.

Mr. Brown, welcome.

STATEMENT OF JERRY J. BROWN

Mr. BROWN. Thank you. On behalf of myself and Mr. Hardy, the executive director of the National Concrete Burial Vault Association, and the National Funeral Directors Association representatives, we would like to thank you very much for this opportunity to come before the committee. This is our second visit.

I would like to just say one thing. Mr. Costanzo mentioned the Tomb of the Unknown. We had the moving and deeply profoundly moving opportunity to place a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown, the National Concrete Burial Vault Association, last summer, and it is, indeed, very touching.

If I may, I would like to just read a brief summary of the NCBVA's position relative to the matter of outer burial receptacles in the national cemetery system, and this is our posture:

To enlighten and recommend the required use of outer interment receptacles for all interments within the national cemetery system for the following reasons: (A) fiscal, (B) ongoing maintenance, (C)

continued beautification of the national cemeteries, (D) safety, (E) dignity, and especially in light of the recently passed Public Law 99-576, where disinterments can be made from the flat sections to the upright; and finally, (F), health considerations.

Number two. In light of the fact that grave liners and burial vaults at least heretofore were not defined as a veterans benefit by Memorial Affairs, national cemetery systems—even with the three national cemeteries operating under the government grave liner contract currently—and because of potential VA budgetary constraints and possible adverse taxpayer reaction, the National Concrete Burial Vault Association recommends the following:

(A) That the Veterans' Administration issue a mandate requiring the use of outer interment receptacles in all national cemeteries, and (B), That the selection, purchase and providing of burial vaults or grave liners be the responsibility of next-of-kin, vis-a-vis the private sector, which is commensurate with the traditional process that exists nationwide: the family-funeral director-manufacturer relationship.

Three, if the VA determines that veterans and eligible dependents must be provided a Government-furnished grave liner at not cost to recipients, NCBVA submits that this is simply a carbon of the 1975-80 Government-furnished grave liner program that was canceled by the OMB in 1980 because of the high capital cost to Memorial Affairs. Further, NCBVA deems government grave liner contracts, per se, as being contrary to the laissez faire free enterprise system; i.e., consumer-funeral establishment-vault manufacturer.

Albeit the NCBVA urges the adoption of a mandatory outer burial receptacle regulation for all national cemeteries, and that source and selection of burial receptacles be the responsibility of next-of-kin—as is, incidentally, the custom in over 90 percent of American's private sector cemeteries—NCBVA submits the following alternative if Memorial Affairs deems it necessary to provide some type of fiscal assistance in the grave liner procurement.

In view of the fact that approximately 400,000 veterans are dying annually, and of this number, an estimated 50,000 to 55,000 are being interred in national cemeteries—representing approximately 20 percent dependents and 17 percent cremation—it is obvious that 88 percent of veterans burials are in private sector cemeteries.

Therefore, in order to achieve a policy which would be equitable and beneficial to all concerned, especially the 88 percent who do not use the national cemetery system, NCBVA recommends that the veterans burial allowance be increased—with outer burial receptacle amounts or sums designated—which would cover the average retail cost of a minimum grave liner, or may be used to apply to or defray the retail cost of any other type of burial vault in interment receptacle to be selected by the next-of-kin from the funeral establishment of choice.

Finally, if for whatever reasons Memorial Affairs does not issue an outer interment receptacle requirement for national cemeteries, it is strongly recommended that a specific recommendation and position of preference statement be issued as part of national cemetery procedures, rule and regulations which would underscore the positive aspects of outer enclosure use to the consumer.

Thank you.

[The statement of Jerry J. Brown appears at p. 63.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Brown, very much.

Mr. Watkins.

STATEMENT OF JAMES E. WATKINS, JR.

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. My name is James E. Watkins, Jr. and I'm here today on behalf of the American Cemetery Association.

Rather than repeat all of my written testimony that has been submitted, which I ask be included in the record, I will try to summarize and discuss the highlights.

Miss KAPTUR. That will be done.

Mr. WATKINS. Before continuing, I would like to respond to my almost Congressman by two-and-a-half miles, and fellow Hoosier, Mr. Burton, the problem at the Gettysburg annex is a perfect example of the consequences that we fear from the present system, and I will try to address this issue as we go along. We are quite concerned about just exactly that, sir.

In these budget-conscious times, our purpose here is to suggest ways in which the government can save money instead of spending it, especially in regard to veterans cemetery maintenance costs. All cemeteries, regardless of whether they are operated by private or government interests, share one common problem: constantly rising maintenance expenses. These costs will continue to escalate in future years due to increased labor expenses, equipment replacement and the uncertain effects of inflation.

But, there is a critical difference in the way non-governmental cemeteries meet these expenses compared to veterans cemeteries. Private cemeteries, usually by State law, have established trust funds into which is placed a percentage of the sales price of each lot, the income of which is used to pay future maintenance costs of operating the cemetery.

By contrast, the national cemetery system has no such trust fund and must rely solely on outlays of Federal tax dollars each year, forever, to meet these continually rising expenses. An expanded Federal cemetery system only increases the problem.

The ACA urges Congress to direct the appropriate Federal agencies, including the General Accounting Office, to conduct an intensive and comprehensive study to determine the actual price tag, including the current value of future care, for running the world's largest cemetery system. Without this information, Congress cannot make informed decisions on whether additional cemeteries should be or need to be constructed in the future.

The second issue we would like to discuss this morning is the problem of inconsistent burial benefit policies. When the national cemetery system was transferred to the VA in 1973, Congress recognized that these cemeteries did not exist in a vacuum but were meant to work in conjunction with cemeteries already existing in the private and religious sectors. By creating alternative forms of burial benefits, such as the burial and plot allowances, Congress sought to encourage veterans to use these resources as their preferences indicated. These burial benefits also relieved the burial case-

load in the national cemeteries. The critical difference here is that the burial allowance is a one-time payment by the Federal Government, whereas interment in a national cemetery creates a continuing financial obligation by the Federal Government to maintain each gravesite forever.

As a practical matter, however, the most cost-effective of benefits, the burial allowance, is the most restrictive in terms of eligibility, while the most expensive benefit, interment in a national cemetery, is the most liberal. The ACA proposes that by sensibly enlarging the eligibility and value of the burial and plot allowances, grave inventory in the national cemeteries will be preserved well beyond the current projected figures. A policy of coordinating burial benefits consistent with their original objectives will reduce the number of interments in national cemeteries, resulting in a reduction in maintenance expenses for future years.

Finally, we are concerned with the likelihood of State veterans cemeteries becoming financial burdens on the Federal Government. VA officials have testified that the State Cemetery Grant Program has not been as popular as anticipated due to the concern in various States with the financial burden of ongoing maintenance costs. After being awarded VA funds to establish State cemeteries, many States are directly dependent upon more Federal assistance for the continued operations of these cemeteries. Unlike the care trusts established for private cemeteries, the State veterans cemeteries must rely on outlays of tax dollars just like the Federal Government. In other words, we're creating a monster that our grandchildren will have to try to kill.

Recently, Congress passed H.R. 2616, which removed the percentage cap on the amount of the VA State cemetery grants, and also authorized the VA to assume responsibility for the Arizona State veterans cemetery. In this new law, then, Congress provided increased incentives for the States to construct their own cemeteries while setting a precedent for the Federal Government to assume the responsibility for these cemeteries later on. The ACA believes that the mechanism for the ultimate failure of the State cemetery system has been set into motion.

So, in addition to the significant yet undocumented costs in maintaining the national cemetery system forever, the contingent liability facing the Federal Government from the State veterans cemeteries has been totally neglected. The ACA proposes that in view of the tremendous ongoing Federal deficits facing the Nation, a comprehensive review of the Government's financial liability with regard to national and State cemetery obligations must be performed before any future expansion of the national cemetery system—directly relating to your remarks in the introduction.

In conclusion, as you ask, the ACA proposes that the Congress, in conjunction with the President, appoint a blue ribbon commission of government and industry experts to make recommendations regarding the future of the national cemetery system, including its cost structure. The ACA would be pleased to participate on such a commission to contribute the expertise of our industry leaders for the benefit of veterans, the government, and the taxpayers.

Thank you for having me here. I want to say I appreciate being at the table with another cemeterian who sets an example for all of

us to follow, and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.

[The statement of James E. Watkins, Jr. appears at p. 65.]

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Watkins, and everyone at the table this morning, for really excellent testimony.

Mr. Watkins, do you have any cost comparisons of a typical burial in a private cemetery versus a national cemetery burial? You mentioned the trust fund and so forth must initially have a higher cost.

Mr. WATKINS. Off the top of my head, no. We would be glad to try to develop some numbers for the record. But it is our observation, in our business, that to try to do it on current income in the future would be business suicide.

We feel, whether or not the trust fund is established, whether the money is set aside, the obligation is there and so it becomes a liability. Whether it's a fund or liability, it is there for the cemetery that does not provide—

Miss KAPTUR. Do all States require a trust fund in setting up a private cemetery system?

Mr. WATKINS. Forty-seven of the 50.

Miss KAPTUR. And those are adequate for maintenance into the future, then?

Mr. WATKINS. We hope. In my own cemetery, we use 25 percent, because Indiana law says 15 and we put in 25 because we don't think 15 is enough. But again, it's an obligation that we have to take care of. We try to recognize it now rather than becoming wards of the State at some time in the future.

Miss KAPTUR. As I sit here as chair of this subcommittee, on the one hand I very much want to be supportive of veterans and memorials that are appropriate; I also believe in giving them equal access to these memorials.

I was interested in Mr. Ebel's statement, that, if you look at the demographics, the choice is, if you happen to be located close enough to a veterans' cemetery and you're a veteran, you get buried there. But if you are the majority of veterans, you are not close enough to one, so you probably resort to a burial allowance.

I have to say it really troubles me, and I'm not sure what the answer is. But it means that all veterans don't get equal access to this burial opportunity in a national cemetery. I, like you, am concerned about the costs of maintaining these systems over the years. I'm not sure what the answer is. I visited some of those regional cemeteries that may never be full. That bothers me a lot. I wasn't around when that law was passed. But at the moment I'm perplexed as to where to move as a committee.

Mr. Costanzo, I wanted to ask you whether or not one of our colleagues, Mr. Charlie Bennett of Florida, has been in touch with you as yet on his particular concern.

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, ma'am.

Miss KAPTUR. In talking with him, do you feel his concerns were met?

Mr. COSTANZO. I will be meeting with Congressman Bennett or his representative after the 6th of June to further discuss his area of concern.

Miss KAPTUR. Excellent, very good. We really appreciate that and would be interested in knowing what transpires and if we need to do anything as a result of that.

I also wanted to ask you a question regarding the Army museum, which is to be constructed on your grounds. When will that museum be completed and what types of exhibits are planned, please?

Mr. COSTANZO. Did you say Army museum?

Miss KAPTUR. Yes.

Mr. COSTANZO. The Department of the Army has discontinued all plans to construct a museum on Arlington National Cemetery property. They are seeking other sites.

Miss KAPTUR. All right.

Mr. BURTON, did you have any questions at this time?

Mr. BURTON. Yes, Madam Chairwoman, just one. Then I want to beg your leave because I have to get over to the floor for some debate that's taking place.

Mr. Costanzo, as I understand it, you're going to start charging for parking in the not too distant future at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. COSTANZO. That is our plan, sir.

Mr. BURTON. What are the revenues that you project you're going to generate from this parking?

Mr. COSTANZO. Revenues, sir?

Mr. BURTON. The annual revenues. How much money are you going to raise from the parking?

Mr. COSTANZO. If the use of the parking facility maintains the same numbers that we have experienced in the temporary parking facility, we estimate it to be a little over a million dollars a year in receipts.

Mr. BURTON. Let me ask you a question. That is a national cemetery and it is revered by everyone in the country. I see that you're going to exempt relatives from paying that fee. But, you know, we don't charge parking for people to come and visit the Lincoln Memorial or the Washington Monument or any of the others here. I just wonder why they came up with this idea. I mean, a million dollars a year is not really that much money as far as that cemetery is concerned.

Why did they decide to do this? That may prohibit some kids and some people who want to see the Kennedy memorial and some of the great edifices there from going in to see them.

Mr. COSTANZO. Sir, the requirement to establish a parking fee was suggested to us in the fiscal year 1987 appropriations.

Mr. BURTON. It wasn't by the Congress; it was by OMB, wasn't it?

Mr. COSTANZO. No, it was by the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. BURTON. The Appropriations Committee of the Congress?

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes. They directed that a study be conducted to determine if it was feasible and to pay back the cost within a reasonable length of time. We prepared that study—

Mr. BURTON. What's the cost of the entire facility going to be?

Mr. COSTANZO. Approximately \$9 million.

Mr. BURTON. And this million dollars in annual revenues in ten years then would repay the cost of construction?

Mr. COSTANZO. It would over approximately a 16 year period, because we would have to include the cost of operation.

Mr. BURTON. Was that a recommendation by the Appropriation Committee or was it a demand? Was it actually legislated?

Mr. COSTANZO. Let me see if I could put it in proper perspective.

Our fiscal year 1987 budget request to operate the cemetery and construct the parking facility was \$15 million. The House subcommittee deleted \$9 million, and directed that the Army study alternatives in which visitors would be charged for parking. We prepared the study and submitted it to the committee, and they approved it. The funds for the parking facility were then restored in the Senate subcommittee report and then finally approved in the House-Senate conference report.

Mr. BURTON. So the money was restored, and when the money was restored, the understanding was that there was going to be a charge for parking?

Mr. COSTANZO. That is correct.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Burton.

Mr. Brown, I wanted to ask you, how much would a typical grave liner cost the government of the United States?

Mr. BROWN. I believe Mr. Ebel mentioned approximately \$87. It is very difficult, given the fact that, at least to my knowledge, there are currently three national cemeteries who still embrace the government for its grave liner program, which is on contract. It's Riverside, CA, Borne, MA, and in Long Island. The \$87 figure seems somewhat, being a vault manufacturer, seems not only low, but it's rather startling.

In 1978, our firm had the government grave liner contract for the Fort Snelling National Cemetery. At that time I believe our contract was in excess of \$100 per unit.

Miss KAPTUR. As I remember from prior testimony here, the private sector uses grave liners extensively, am I correct, almost 100 percent?

Mr. WATKINS. Almost exclusively.

Miss KAPTUR. That's what I thought.

Mr. Costanzo, you have a responsibility for one of the truly magnificent national memorials that we have in this country. As you have traveled around the country and you look at our alternatives in trying to deal with this question of veterans burial benefits, the number of cemeteries that we have across the country, some being used, some closed, a desire to increase cemeteries in certain States that would be operated and owned by the Federal Government, what are your own personal reactions to this? Have you given much thought to, if you were in charge of the whole system, how you might separate out the various conflicting issues here that we're faced with as a subcommittee and trying to plan for the future?

Mr. COSTANZO. Are you talking about expansion of the national cemetery system versus burial in private cemeteries?

Miss KAPTUR. That's one choice. Another choice would be expanding the State cemetery systems. Now where we are is that we have many regional cemeteries not being able to be filled for a long time, and you're full up almost—really, you're running out of space

over there at Arlington. But we have these four areas of the country—Seattle, Cleveland, Albany and Chicago—where these environmental impact statements are being conducted and it's likely that we will expand the system there. Those four areas are lucky and I guess they've been selected based on the number of veterans that reside in those areas.

If you had responsibility for shaping this system, what would you do? Would you try to work with the private sector and increase the burial allowances, or would you—

Mr. COSTANZO. That's a very difficult question for me to answer. But I personally believe in freedom of choice and I think that the veteran should have a choice of burial in a national cemetery, if that's what they wish, or burial in a private cemetery closer to their home with perhaps government burial allowances. So maybe a combination and mixture of both is probably what the country needs.

Miss KAPTUR. One of the witnesses had indicated that by 2010 or 2020, if we were to make no changes, we would only have about 34 operating cemeteries where people were still being interred, unless we change it.

What are the costs associated with maintaining a cemetery that is technically closed, where you aren't doing any more burials, but you have maintenance, versus cemeteries that are being actively used? Do you have parts of Arlington that are closed, where you have to—

Mr. COSTANZO. No.

Miss KAPTUR. You have to maintain the entire site?

Mr. COSTANZO. We maintain the entire cemetery. But there are sections within Arlington that require little or no maintenance, particularly in the old Civil War sections, where the cost of maintenance is much less.

Miss KAPTUR. It is?

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, than it is for the newer active sections. The gravesites and headstones are stabilized, and maintenance is reduced to only mowing of the grass. The labor-intensive areas are in the newly-developed active sections.

Miss KAPTUR. Are all of your headstones at Arlington upright?

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, they are.

Miss KAPTUR. Do you have difficulty finding personnel to cut around those gravestones?

Mr. COSTANZO. No. I believe that flat markers have to be trimmed just as well as you do the uprights.

Miss KAPTUR. One of the arguments that some of the VA cemetery directors give us is they don't really like the uprights because they can't find personnel to cut around the stones. I found that interesting. They said they couldn't hire people.

Mr. COSTANZO. I would imagine you would still have to trim even on the flat-type markers. Not as much, but there would be some.

Miss KAPTUR. I sense Mr. Watkins wants to chime in here. Am I sensing that correctly?

Mr. WATKINS. You are quite right. We have both types of sections in my cemetery, both traditional above-ground monuments and flush marker sections. A flush marker section is considerably less expensive to maintain. You're quite right, that there is some

trimming required, but much, much less. Larger equipment can be used to maintain them. It is a far less costly form of maintenance. But you are quite right. They do require some maintenance.

Miss KAPTUR. Mr. Wilson, would you like to ask any additional questions here?

Mr. WILSON. Mr. Costanzo, which appropriation act was it that contained the language about the parking?

Mr. COSTANZO. It was in the fiscal year 1987 HUD Independent Agency Subcommittee on Appropriations.

Mr. WILSON. Was that part of the continuing resolution last year?

Mr. COSTANZO. No, it was in our appropriation for 1987.

Mr. WILSON. Are you aware, or do you know if the general public is aware of the fact that you're about to start charging for parking in October?

Mr. COSTANZO. No, there has been no public press release. We're getting ready to prepare one.

Let me add something else. We have prepared the language for some enabling legislation that will permit us to operate the revolving fund, to operate the parking facility, and I'm sure when that piece of legislation has cleared the DOD approval process and it comes into the Congress, that this committee will probably have an opportunity to voice its feelings on that matter.

Mr. WILSON. I think it is fair to say that this committee will.

Mr. Watkins, does the trust fund requirement also apply to those cemeteries that are adjacent to the thousands of churches around the country?

Mr. WATKINS. I can't answer that for every State. I think in many States it does not. Religious cemeteries in my own State, for example, are exempt from trust fund requirements, although many religious cemeteries do provide such funds.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Miss KAPTUR. Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

I want to thank all of you gentlemen. Mr. Costanzo, I have to thank you in particular. We have asked for your assistance many times for various purposes at Arlington and you've just been wonderful. Thank you so very much. We appreciate all of you, Mr. Brown, Mr. Watkins, and Mr. Morgan, for being with us today.

The hearing is officially adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

TESTIMONY OF WILFRED L. EBEL
CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MAY 26, 1988

GOOD MORNING, MADAM CHAIRWOMAN. I AM PLEASED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH AN UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. AS REQUESTED IN YOUR LETTER OF INVITATION, I WILL ALSO COMMENT ON OUR PLANS FOR A POLICY STUDY REGARDING FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

1988 MARKS TWO IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MEMORIAL PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY VA. IT HAS BEEN 15 YEARS SINCE CONGRESS PASSED THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES ACT (PUBLIC LAW 93-43) ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WITHIN THE VA. AND 10 YEARS AGO, MEMORIAL AFFAIRS WAS DESIGNATED A DEPARTMENT WITHIN THE VA ORGANIZATION, IN RECOGNITION OF ITS OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING BENEFITS DIRECTLY TO VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS.

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM HAS EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS. IN 1973, THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM CONSISTED OF 103 CEMETERIES -- 82 WHICH HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED FROM THE ARMY, AND ANOTHER 21 WHICH HAD BEEN PART OF THE VA. TODAY WE HAVE 111 CEMETERIES IN THE

SYSTEM, 65 OF THEM OPEN TO NEW INTERMENTS AND 46 CLOSED. THIS WEEKEND WE ARE GOING TO FLORIDA TO DEDICATE THE 112TH NATIONAL CEMETERY. ANOTHER CEMETERY IS UNDER DEVELOPMENT TO SERVE THE LARGE VETERAN POPULATION IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, WHICH WE HOPE TO OPEN IN 1991. INTERMENTS IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES HAVE INCREASED FROM 36,433 IN 1973 TO 53,665 IN 1987, AND AN ANTICIPATED 55,000 THIS YEAR. THAT IS A 50% INCREASE IN 15 YEARS.

DURING THIS TIME WE HAVE ALSO NOTED MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS IN EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY. FOR EXAMPLE, FROM 1977 TO 1987, EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY INCREASED 36% IN THE GRAVESITE MAINTENANCE AREA, AND 22% FOR INTERMENT OPERATIONS. FOR THE SAME PERIOD, EMPLOYMENT LEVELS INCREASED ONLY 6%.

NUMBERS ALONE DO NOT TELL THE FULL STORY OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. AMONG THE MOST MOVING EVENTS OF THE PAST YEAR WERE CEREMONIES IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, TO MARK THE GRAVES OF TWO MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS FROM THE INDIAN WARS. DESCENDENTS OF BOTH HEROES, INCLUDING HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS WHO TRAVELED TO THE UNITED STATES FROM FRANCE, ATTENDED THE CEREMONIES WHICH FINALLY RECOGNIZED THESE INDIVIDUALS AS RECIPIENTS OF THE NATION'S HIGHEST AWARD FOR VALOR.

THIS YEAR ALSO SAW A NEW GROUP RECEIVE ELIGIBILITY FOR VA BENEFITS, INCLUDING BURIAL IN A NATIONAL CEMETERY. MEMBERS OF THE MERCHANT MARINE WHO SERVED IN OCEAN-GOING VESSELS DURING WORLD WAR II WERE GRANTED ELIGIBILITY BY A DIRECTIVE FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE DATED

JANUARY 19, 1988. I AM PLEASED TO SAY THAT VA WAS ABLE TO ESTABLISH SOME PRIORITY PROCEDURES WITH THE COAST GUARD, AND THAT FAMILIES WHO WISH TO HAVE A LOVED ONE BURIED IN A NATIONAL CEMETERY DO NOT HAVE TO WAIT MONTHS OR YEARS TO HAVE A DD 214 ISSUED. WE MADE THE FIRST INTERMENT OF A MERCHANT MARINER AT CALVERTON NATIONAL CEMETERY ON FEBRUARY 4.

ANOTHER HIGHLIGHT OF THE PAST YEAR WAS DEDICATION OF OUR 111TH NATIONAL CEMETERY IN WEST VIRGINIA. THE NEARBY GRAFTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, WHICH HAS BEEN CLOSED SINCE 1961, CONTAINS THE REMAINS OF MANY CIVIL WAR DEAD, INCLUDING PRIVATE THORNBERRY BAILEY BROWN, THE FIRST CASUALTY OF THE CIVIL WAR. ON MEMORIAL DAY 1987, VA HAD DEDICATED THE 110TH NATIONAL CEMETERY AT FT. MITCHELL, ALABAMA. THIS IS LOCATED IN ONE OF THE MOST HISTORIC AREAS OF ALABAMA, AND WAS THE SITE OF ANCIENT INDIAN SETTLEMENTS AS WELL AS AN IMPORTANT PLANTATION AND AN EARLY MILITARY FORT.

WE ARE STILL ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN PRESERVING AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR NATION'S HISTORY. FOR EXAMPLE, NEXT MONTH THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA WILL CO-SPONSOR A REPATRIATION CEREMONY FOR THE REMAINS OF A GROUP OF UNKNOWNNS FROM THE WAR OF 1812. THESE UNKNOWNNS, WHO WERE RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN ONTARIO PROVINCE, WILL BE INTERRED WITH FULL MILITARY HONORS IN THE BATH NATIONAL CEMETERY.

NATIONAL CEMETERIES HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED BY CONGRESS AS NATIONAL SHRINES. EACH GRAVE REPRESENTS A MAN OR WOMAN WHO ONCE WAS PROUD TO WEAR THIS COUNTRY'S UNIFORM. THERE ARE FAMOUS NAMES, LIKE ELLISON ONIZUKA OF THE SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER, AND CONGRESSWOMAN SALA BURTON WHO WAS BURIED

BESIDE HER HUSBAND, ALSO A MEMBER OF CONGRESS, JUST OVER A YEAR AGO. AND THERE ARE UNKNOWNNS, LIKE THOSE THOUSANDS FROM THE CIVIL WAR. EACH GRAVE IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT IN OUR CHARGE. IN A DIFFERENT WAY, I BELIEVE THAT THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM SHARES THE CONCERNS REFLECTED IN YOUR COMMITTEE'S BILL TO ESTABLISH A MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM TO WORLD WAR II. IT IS A PART OF OUR NATION'S HISTORY THAT WE WANT TO SHARE WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS.

IN ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM, THE DEPARTMENT OF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING HEADSTONES AND MARKERS FOR VETERANS' GRAVES. THIS PROGRAM HAS ALSO EXPERIENCED SOME VERY SIGNIFICANT WORKLOAD GROWTH. IN 1973, FOR EXAMPLE, VA FURNISHED 190,380 HEADSTONES AND MARKERS. LAST FISCAL YEAR, THE FIGURE WAS 253,581.

IN OUR TESTIMONY BEFORE YOUR SUBCOMMITTEE LAST JULY, DMA REPORTED THAT WE WERE WORKING ON A SERIOUS BACKLOG IN THIS PROGRAM. I AM HAPPY TO TELL YOU THAT THIS PROGRAM IS BACK ON TRACK, AND THAT WE ARE MAKING EXCELLENT PROGRESS. THE APPLICATIONS PROCESS HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY AUTOMATED, WHICH IS SPEEDING UP DELIVERIES, AND ALSO ALLOWS US TO CHECK THE STATUS OF AN INDIVIDUAL REQUEST MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY.

WITH SOME GOOD ADVICE FROM THE VA ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS, WE HAVE ALSO MADE SOME POLICY CHANGES WHICH WILL BETTER SERVE VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, AT LITTLE OR NO COST TO THE GOVERNMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN AN INSCRIPTION HAS AN ERROR, VA WILL REPLACE THE MARKER FREE OF CHARGE REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE FAULT WAS OURS OR THE APPLICANT'S.

THIS IS A MAJOR SOURCE OF RELIEF TO PEOPLE WHO, PERHAPS OVERCOME WITH GRIEF OR CONFUSION, OVERLOOKED AN ERROR ON AN APPLICATION FORM. WE WILL ALSO AUTHORIZE INSCRIPTION OF MORE THAN ONE BRANCH OF SERVICE AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE. ANOTHER CHANGE WHICH WE ARE IMPLEMENTING IS INCLUSION OF VALOR AWARDS ON VETERANS MARKERS AS PART OF THE STANDARD INSCRIPTION. PREVIOUSLY, FAMILIES HAD TO PAY FOR THIS. IN VIEW OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SAVINGS REALIZED, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO NET COST TO EITHER OF THESE CHANGES, AND THE BENEFITS ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO THE FAMILIES INVOLVED.

INTEREST HAS ALSO BEEN STRONG IN VA'S STATE CEMETERY GRANTS PROGRAM. UNDER THIS PROGRAM, VA MAY PROVIDE UP TO 50% MATCHING FUNDS TO STATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OR IMPROVEMENT OF A STATE VETERANS CEMETERY. CONGRESS ENACTED THIS PROGRAM IN 1978 AS A MEANS OF COMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THE GRANTS HELP IN PROVIDING ADDITIONAL BURIAL SPACE FOR VETERANS IN LOCATIONS WHICH ARE REMOTE FROM A NATIONAL CEMETERY, AND WHERE THERE IS STRONG LOCAL DESIRE FOR A SPECIAL BURIAL PLACE FOR VETERANS.

VA HAS MADE GRANTS TO ARIZONA, CONNECTICUT, HAWAII, ILLINOIS, MAINE, MARYLAND, MONTANA, NEW JERSEY, RHODE ISLAND, WYOMING, WISCONSIN, AND THE TERRITORY OF GUAM. THIS PROGRAM HAS BEEN REAUTHORIZED ON A FIVE-YEAR BASIS, WHICH WILL EXPIRE IN 1989. VA WOULD RECOMMEND THAT THE SUBCOMMITTEE FAVORABLY CONSIDER A LEGISLATIVE EXTENSION NEXT YEAR, AS WE BELIEVE THE PROGRAM PROVIDES A VERY GOOD SERVICE TO VETERANS.

SERVING THE AGING VETERAN

THE WORKLOAD EXPANSION IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE INCREASING UNTIL THE YEAR 2010, AND TO THEN TAPER OFF SOMEWHAT TO

THE YEAR 2020. LAST YEAR CONGRESS INDICATED ITS CONCERN IN A PROVISION OF PUBLIC LAW 99-576, WHICH REQUIRED AN EXTENSIVE REPORT ON THE ABILITY OF THE SYSTEM TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS. THIS REPORT WAS SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS IN JUNE 1987. TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO UPDATE THE SUBCOMMITTEE WITH REGARD TO SOME OF THE INITIATIVES MENTIONED IN THE REPORT.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, VA DEDICATED NEW NATIONAL CEMETERIES IN FT. MITCHELL, ALABAMA, AND IN WEST VIRGINIA LAST YEAR. WE WILL BE DEDICATING A NEW CEMETERY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA IN ABOUT 72 HOURS. AND THERE IS A NEW CEMETERY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA UNDER DEVELOPMENT.

EXISTING NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE BEING EXPANDED THROUGH DONATION OF ADJACENT PROPERTY WHEREVER POSSIBLE. GENEROUS AND PATRIOTIC GROUPS HAVE DONE THIS ALREADY AT PLACES LIKE BATH, SPRINGFIELD AND WOODLAWN NATIONAL CEMETERIES. WE ALSO HAVE SOME VERY GOOD PROSPECTS AT LITTLE ROCK, FT. SMITH, SANTA FE, AND FT. BAYARD. CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVE HAS RESULTED IN LAND TRANSFERS FROM THE ARMY TO EXPAND NATIONAL CEMETERIES AT FT. SAM HOUSTON, TEXAS, AND AT ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS. IN ADDITION, VA HAS IMPLEMENTED ANOTHER OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE REPORT, WHICH IS TO PERMIT PURCHASE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. THE VA ADMINISTRATOR HAS APPROVED SUCH A PURCHASE, IN CONCEPT, FOR THE WILLAMETTE NATIONAL CEMETERY, IN PORTLAND, OREGON, WHICH IS ONE OF THE NATION'S BUSIEST. VA'S OFFICE OF FACILITIES IS INVESTIGATING THE PROPERTY FURTHER, AND I AM OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE OUTCOME.

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN, YOUR LETTER OF INVITATION SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED A STATUS REPORT ON THE POLICY STUDY RECOMMENDED IN THE JUNE 1987 STUDY. VA HAS IDENTIFIED SOME POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THE POLICY STUDY IS IN DRAFT FORM, AND IS UNDER REVIEW. I WILL BE PLEASED TO KEEP YOU INFORMED AS WE GET CLOSER TO HAVING A FINAL REPORT TO SUBMIT TO YOU.

UPRIGHT GRAVE MARKERS

ANOTHER ISSUE WHICH WAS ADDRESSED IN PUBLIC LAW 99-576 WAS THE STYLE OF GRAVE MARKER TO BE USED IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES. AS REPORTED TO YOU AT OUR HEARING LAST JULY, VA HAS WORKED TO IMPLEMENT THIS PROVISION IN SPIRIT AS WELL AS IN LETTER. ALL OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES WHICH HAD USED UPRIGHT MARKERS PREVIOUS TO A POLICY CHANGE IN 1982 HAVE NOW RETURNED TO THE UPRIGHT STYLE TRADITIONALLY USED AT THOSE LOCATIONS. OTHER CEMETERIES ARE BEING CONVERTED TO THE UPRIGHT STYLE AS REQUIRED BY LAW.

QUALITY AND INNOVATION

THERE IS, RIGHTLY, A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS ON "MORE" THESE DAYS -- MORE WORK, MORE FACILITIES, MORE PEOPLE, MORE RESOURCES, MORE PRODUCTIVITY. OUR DEPARTMENT IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT QUALITY AND INNOVATION. WE WANT TO DO THINGS BETTER AND SMARTER.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT INNOVATIONS HAS BEEN GREATER USE OF AUTOMATION. I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED THE DIFFERENCE THIS IS MAKING IN OUR HEADSTONE AND MARKER PROGRAM. WE ARE ALSO INSTALLING COMPUTER EQUIPMENT IN MANY OF OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES WHICH WILL TIE THEM INTO VA'S AUTOMATED FILES.

THAT WILL HELP US DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY, AND COULD MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE TO FAMILIES IN THE CRITICAL HOURS WHEN THEY ARE TRYING TO MAKE FINAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR A LOVED ONE. THIS EQUIPMENT ALSO ENABLES US TO AUTOMATE ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS LIKE BUDGETS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND EVENTUALLY THE RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM FOR INTERMENTS.

THE MEMORIAL AFFAIRS PROVISIONS WHICH YOUR SUBCOMMITTEE SPONSORED LAST YEAR, AND WHICH HAVE NOW BEEN INCORPORATED INTO THE VETERANS BENEFITS AND SERVICES ACT OF 1988, WILL ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF OUR OPERATIONS. THE SAFE INGRESS/EGRESS PROVISION, FOR EXAMPLE, IS SOMETHING THAT WILL BE USED WHEN ESSENTIAL FOR PROVIDING SAFETY FEATURES AT NATIONAL CEMETERY ENTRANCES. WE ARE ALSO CONDUCTING A STUDY OF GRAVELINERS, TO DETERMINE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THEY COULD BE USED MOST EFFECTIVELY. THE TECHNICAL CHANGE IN STATE GRANT FUNDING WILL HELP US USE THIS PROGRAM AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE IN ASSISTING STATES WHICH ARE INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING THEIR OWN VETERANS CEMETERIES. AND THE PROVISION CLARIFYING VA AUTHORITY ON GARDEN NICHE MARKERS ENABLES US TO UTILIZE SCARCE LAND FOR BURIAL OF CREMATED REMAINS. GARDEN NICHES WERE ALSO A RECOMMENDATION IN THE JUNE 1987 REPORT.

I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED SOME POLICY CHANGES REGARDING MARKER INSCRIPTIONS, WHICH RESPOND TO THE DESIRES OF NEXT OF KIN, AT LITTLE OR NO COST TO THE VA. WE ARE LOOKING AT ALL OF OUR INTERNAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES WITH A VIEW TO HOW THEY CAN BE IMPROVED TO SERVE VETERANS BETTER.

VA HAS LONG RECEIVED OUTSTANDING SERVICE FROM COMMUNITY AND SERVICE ORGANIZATION VOLUNTEERS, ESPECIALLY AT THE MEDICAL CENTERS. NATIONAL CEMETERIES ALSO BENEFIT FROM VOLUNTEERS. WE HAVE SOME INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS, SUCH AS VOLUNTEER RIFLE SQUADS WHICH PROVIDE MILITARY HONORS AT FT. SNELLING AND FT. CUSTER NATIONAL CEMETERIES. DMA IS ENCOURAGING OTHER LOCALITIES TO ADOPT THIS ALTERNATIVE WHEN THE MILITARY SERVICES ARE NOT ABLE TO PROVIDE HONORS ON A REGULAR BASIS. ANOTHER NEW PROGRAM HAS RECENTLY STARTED AT RIVERSIDE NATIONAL CEMETERY, IN WHICH VOLUNTEERS ASSIST VISITORS ON WEEKENDS IN LOCATING GRAVESITES. NATIONAL CEMETERIES ALSO COOPERATE WITH NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE UNITS WHICH CAN USE OUR FACILITIES FOR TRAINING PROJECTS.

DMA IS STRENGTHENING ITS MANAGEMENT TEAM BY ENCOURAGING CEMETERY DIRECTORS TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION GOALS, BY PARTICIPATING IN SPECIAL ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THE WOMEN'S EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM AND THE LEGIS FELLOWS PROGRAM SPONSORED BY THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, AND BY CONTINUING IMPROVEMENTS TO OUR INTERNAL MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO COMMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF VA'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS. THIS COMMITTEE WAS ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS IN 1973 AS A MEANS TO PROVIDE THE ADMINISTRATOR WITH ADVICE ON THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. MEMBERS ARE APPOINTED BY THE ADMINISTRATOR FOR A ONE YEAR RENEWABLE TERM. THIS YEAR WE HAVE ENHANCED THE ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE, AND HAVE REPRESENTATIVES FROM ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION, AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, AS

WELL AS MAJOR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHERS. IN EFFECT, WE NOW HAVE FOR THE FIRST TIME A SINGLE FORUM FOR DISCUSSION OF MAJOR ISSUES AFFECTING ALL FEDERAL CEMETERIES.

I WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE WITH THE DMA CREDO. THIS IS A NEW STATEMENT OF AN ENDURING CONCEPT. I BELIEVE THE CREDO HELPS OUR EMPLOYEES AND THE PUBLIC UNDERSTAND WHAT THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS AND SHOULD BE, AND THE LEVEL OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT WHICH THOSE OF US WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SYSTEM MUST MAKE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS. WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I REQUEST THAT THE CREDO, WHICH ACCOMPANIES THIS STATEMENT, BE ENTERED FOR THE RECORD.

DMA CREDO

We are the Department of Memorial Affairs.

We pledge to conduct the memorial affairs of eligible veterans and dependents with dignity and compassion.

We treat each National Cemetery as a national shrine created in tribute to the sacrifices made by over 39 million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

We believe that National Cemeteries are as much for the living as for the deceased, a place to rejoice as much as to grieve, and to that end we solemnly vow to preserve and perfect these sacred grounds in perpetuity.

We dedicate ourselves, individually and collectively, to improved quality of service and increased productivity in meeting the needs of veterans and their families.

We encourage community participation in enhancement and beautification projects and to that end we strive constantly to improve public awareness and understanding of our mission.

We take great pride in our past accomplishments and freely promise to continue to fulfill our responsibilities to America's veterans as a matter of professional pride and personal honor.



Veterans
Administration

**THE NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

"STRENGTH IN UNITY"



Statement of

Richard W. Johnson, Jr.
Director of Legislative Affairs

before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

on

Cemetery System Oversight

May 26, 1988



NATIONAL CAPITAL OFFICE

225 N. Washington Street • Alexandria, VA 22314 • Tele: (703) 549-0311



Thank you for inviting the Non Commissioned Officers Association of the USA (NCOA) to comment on the National Cemetery System. Foremost among association concerns regarding the National Cemetery system is its expansion and augmentation to meet the ever growing needs of veterans. Also addressed in this testimony are suggestions for improvement in the American Battle Monuments Commission, encouragement to resist further exceptions in the use of upright markers in National Cemeteries and a plea to unify support for H.R. 1987 to designate an official name for the burial site of the unknown servicemembers of W.W. I, W.W. II, Korea and Vietnam.

National Cemetery System

As required by P.L. 99-576 the Veterans Administration last June published a report on the National Cemetery System. In compliance with the law it comments on four issues. They are: plans for operation of the cemetery system through the year 2000; identification of the areas in which the need for a national cemetery is greatest; an assessment of the desirability for federal acquisition of state veteran's cemeteries; and, a general plan for expansion of the system.

In summary, the report concluded the current National Cemetery System is adequate through the year 2000 and beyond. It suggested no improvements in the system beyond those which have already been implemented and it suggested no changes in operating policy. In fact, the report went out of its way to state, seemingly on every tenth page, that nothing contained therein should be considered as a change in administration policy supporting the regional cemetery concept developed in 1974 and that further development of the system would not be in conformance with that policy. Indeed, nothing new has emerged from the report. That does not mean NCOA views the report as useless. Quite the contrary. It identified some significant problems the system will face in the future.

According to the report, 21 of the VA's 65 operating cemeteries will close between now and the year 2000. Another 15 will close in the first 20 years of the next century. Planned growth in the cemetery system will replace 5 of the 36 losses. In net, the system will lose 31 cemeteries in 33 years, leaving only 34 operating cemeteries by the year 2020. The report also acknowledges that this decline will reduce the potential population of veterans served from 70 percent to 49-percent using a radial measure of 100 miles. A more reasonable 50 mile access radius reduces the population to less than 35 percent. In sum, this is an excellent warning of what inattention to expansion will produce.

Concurrently, the report suggests the VA will take five steps to enhance cemetery operations. Four of these commendable initiatives are already underway. They include completion of cemeteries already under construction; greater participation in the State Veteran Cemetery Grant Program; progressive land development in existing open national cemeteries; and, limited expansion of existing national cemeteries.

Missing is the policy review for future expansion of the National Cemetery System. The report clearly states that "Expansion of the National Cemetery System under present policy, the regional concept, culminated with the establishment of Fort Mitchell National Cemetery to serve Standard Federal Region IV." It further states, "The five-point plan outlined here is directed to serving the largest segment of the veteran population in the effective way and, to the extent possible, with states' participation."

In summary, the report said the VA will operate the existing National Cemetery System to the best of its ability, but the future of the national

system is one of decline. The report also said the only future for veterans' burial sites rests with the participation of states in the grant program. The report all but abrogates federal responsibility for the expansion of the cemetery system to the states. It vests all future growth of the system in state participation in the grant program.

The official report seems comfortable with that, but a previous, unpublished report prepared in 1986 seems less sanguine about the use of state cemeteries as useful supplements. It concluded that, "With the exception of the Arizona Veteran Memorial Cemetery and two Maryland veteran cemeteries, interments in state cemeteries are minimal." The 1986 report attributes the state cemetery problems to restrictive eligibility requirements, inappropriate location and lack of public knowledge about the benefit. Some of these problems are related to deficits in the grant program, particularly with regard to location and eligibility. Yet, even with changes in the grant program, this is still a highly unreliable asset upon which to gamble future availability of cemeteries for veterans.

The previous report, whose publication was suppressed by OMB according to a VA memorandum, concluded that only about 34 percent of veterans were reasonably served by existing cemeteries including regional cemeteries. That conclusion was drawn from using population measures within a 50 mile radius of the cemetery. NCOA views this as a more reasonable measure than the 100 mile service radius used in the published report. However, the one area of agreement between the two reports is that services can be expanded to 26 percent more veterans by opening cemeteries in ten population centers. Expansion of the system into these areas would put more than 60 percent of veterans within 50 miles of a national cemetery, more than 90 percent within 100 miles.

The regional cemetery policy was and is a wise alternative to the haphazard development which occurred prior to its adoption, but it is not a stand alone solution. A federal region is just too large to be served by a single cemetery. More than ten years of experience with the system demonstrates that more than half of all interments in regional cemeteries are veterans whose families reside within 50 miles of the cemetery. Most are from within the state. Additionally, while the current system has potentially 3.5 million gravesites, this is far short of fulfilling the needs of the 20 million veterans expected to die between now and 2020.

Public Law 99-576, in addition to requiring a comprehensive study of the cemetery system, also authorized the Administrator to begin planning, land acquisition, and development of cemeteries in ten specifically named population centers. A provision of the bill even granted the Administrator authority to expand the system into any state not currently served by an open National Cemetery. Clearly the advice and consent implicit in the law has been rejected by the Administration.

For this reason, NCOA urges the committee to adopt a new policy for expansion of the system beginning with the construction of cemeteries in the ten areas identified in the VA study as demographically optimum locations. It is time, NCOA believes, to force a policy change upon the VA. That policy should direct establishment of a National Cemetery system composed of regional cemeteries augmented by planned cemeteries to serve veterans population centers and complimented by grant cemeteries in participating states.

American Battle Monuments Commission

Since it was created in 1923 the American Battle Monuments Commission has amassed an enviable record of achievement among Federal organizations.

Organizationally it is responsible for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of American military cemeteries in foreign countries and certain battle monuments in the U.S. and abroad. Through the dedicated efforts of its commissioners and employees this independent agency has maintained the honor and dignity of American participation in military actions to preserve freedom worldwide.

Also since its inception, service on the commission has been limited by law to commissioned officers. Such restriction was not uncharacteristic for the times but it is archaic today. The enlisted servicemember, the noncommissioned and petty officer, bear the brunt of the battle preceding the creation of every memorial. They should be represented on the commission.

NCOA urges the committee to enact legislation authorizing the appointment of otherwise qualified noncommissioned or petty officers to ABMC.

Upright Markers

The return to the use of upright markers in National Cemeteries has been quite successful and well received by members of NCOA. As might be expected some use of flat markers will be continued in matters of family preference, but this is provided in the law and causes no problem. However, NCOA is disturbed by requests for exemptions from the requirement to use upright markers, several of which have already been granted. Upright markers are very symbolic of the honor associated with military service. Additionally, they resolve the practical problems of locating gravesites in areas prone to ground cover by snow and falling leaves. Accordingly, NCOA implores the committee to reject any further erosion in the use of upright markers in National Cemeteries.

Tomb of the Unknowns

One of the most significant oversights in our nation's history has been the lack of an official name for the burial site at Arlington Cemetery wherein the remains of the unknown servicemembers of World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict and the Vietnam War lie.

In 1921 when the first unknown American soldier was interred at Arlington Cemetery, it was reasonable to assume that the servicemember was a member of the United States Army, as World War I was primarily a land war. Thus, in common usage the tomb area was referred to as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

However, with the internment of the unknowns from World War II and the Korean conflict, engagements involving soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen, the term unknown soldier was no longer appropriate to honor the service of those Americans from other branches of the armed service. The internment of the remains of the Vietnam War unknown has served to increase the urgency for providing an official name for this national shrine.

Although the authority to officially name any and all features within Arlington National Cemetery is within the purview of the Secretary of the Army, Secretary Marsh has deferred the official naming of the tomb area to Congress because of its national significance.

Last year legislation to officially name the Tomb of the Unknowns, H.R. 1987, seemed to be on the fast track to congressional approval. The bill had the unanimous support of veterans organizations. No Federal agency opposed it. Since it merely codified common practice it seemed noncontroversial. Yet the bill has stalled.

NCOA urges the committee to make every effort to start the bill moving again. It urges members who have objection to the measure to reflect upon the national importance of officially naming the tomb. Concurrently, NCOA implores the sponsors of the measure to make accommodation if reasonable and possible to those who seek modification of the proposal. Above all, NCOA urges open and rapid consideration the the measure.

Thank you.

-end-

STATEMENT OF
 RICHARD F. SCHULTZ
 ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
 DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
 BEFORE THE
 SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
 OF THE
 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
 U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 MAY 26, 1988

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the more than 1.1 million members of the Disabled American Veterans and its Ladies' Auxiliary, may I say how very much we appreciate this opportunity to express our views relative to the Veterans Administration National Cemetery system.

At the outset, Madam Chairwoman, the DAV wishes to commend you on this timely exercise of your oversight responsibilities relative to the VA's National Cemetery system. Clearly, the efforts of this subcommittee over the years have had a positive impact on the operation of the VA's National Cemetery system.

Madam Chairwoman, as you are aware, it has been nearly 126 years since President Lincoln signed into law a measure authorizing the purchase of cemetery grounds to inter remains of individuals who died in military service preserving the freedoms we enjoy today. Public Law 94-43, the "National Cemetery Act of 1973," established the current National Cemetery system placing it under the direction of the VA.

With the dedication of the central Florida National Cemetery on May 29, 1988, the VA National Cemetery system will consist of 112 operating National Cemeteries in 38 states and Puerto Rico. However, of these 112 National Cemeteries, 46 are closed with an additional 20 scheduled for closure by the year 2000. Additionally, 12 states have no National Cemetery and there are six states where the National Cemetery is closed to new interment. Simply put, 36% of the 50 states have no National Cemetery gravesites.

Madam Chairwoman, at present, approximately 70% of our nation's veteran population resides within 100 miles of a National Cemetery -- thus having reasonable access to a National Cemetery. However, it is estimated that, should no new National Cemeteries be constructed and existing National Cemeteries be allowed to close, by the year 2020 less than one half of our nation's veterans will reside within a reasonable distance of a National Cemetery -- occurring at a time when the anticipated demand for National Cemeteries will be at its greatest.

In June 1987, the VA issued a report entitled, "Report on the VA National Cemetery System." This report, required by Public Law 99-576, describes the anticipated future demand to be placed on the National Cemetery system, listing 10 geographical locations where the need for additional burial space is the greatest. We are pleased to note that an environmental impact study as been authorized for four of the 10 locations listed in the VA's report and, at one location (Northern California) a National Cemetery is scheduled to be opened by 1991.

Madam Chairwoman, as indicated in our testimony before the Subcommittee last July, the DAV views the VA's persistence to continue a National Cemetery system policy based solely on the regional concept as unrealistic -- especially in light of the

fact that by the year 2020 more than one half of our nation's veteran population will reside more than 100 miles from an open National Cemetery. Hopefully, the VA's soon to be issued policy for future expansion of the National Cemetery system will recommend a more aggressive approach to the problem of providing accessible burial space for all of our nation's veterans.

In addressing the issue of providing reasonably accessible gravesites for our nation's veteran population, our National Convention delegates adopted a resolution expressing our belief that any expansion of the National Cemetery system should be based on a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one open National Cemetery in each state. Such a policy, we believe, will provide a final resting place relatively close to a veteran's home and family.

The DAV also recognizes the importance of the State Veterans' Cemetery Construction Grant Program in helping to alleviate the problem of accessible burial space. In this regard, we wish to recognize the Committee's efforts to repeal the requirement in Section 1008(b) of Title 38, U. S. Code, limiting the amount a state can receive from an appropriation in any Fiscal Year. Hopefully, this action will help to facilitate a greater usage of this important grant program.

Madam Chairwoman, our National Convention delegates have also taken a position in support of a uniform policy to provide cement graveliners in all National Cemeteries. As you know, even though graveliners have proven to be cost-effective by reducing maintenance and repair costs, the VA currently only furnishes graveliners in three National Cemeteries. We are encouraged, however, to note that H.R. 2616, recently enacted into law, will permit the VA to provide graveliners for any grave in the National Cemetery system. However, we are concerned that since this legislation does not require the Administrator to provide graveliners for all new interments at National Cemeteries, it will have little effect on the current limited use of graveliners by the VA in National Cemeteries.

Madam Chairwoman, the DAV has previously expressed our views on the issue of gravemarkers before this Subcommittee. We opposed previous VA policy to use only flat gravemarkers in National Cemeteries as, in our view, this practice was unfair to veterans and their survivors. We believe veterans and their loved ones should have a choice, when possible, to the type of gravemarkers they desire.

While we appreciate the desire to keep our National Cemeteries as attractive as possible and recognize that upright gravemarkers certainly add to the beauty of our National Cemeteries, we do, however, suggest that, whenever possible, a choice be given to veterans and their families as to the type of gravemarkers they prefer.

In this regard, we are pleased to note that H.R. 2616 also provides for exceptions to the upright gravemarker requirement. Possibly, as new cemeteries are constructed or existing ones expanded, consideration should also be given to provide an exemption to the upright gravemarker requirement by designating sections in these cemeteries for flat or upright gravemarkers.

This concludes our statement, Madam Chairwoman. We again wish to thank you and the members of the Subcommittee for your continued efforts to provide a proper burial for our nation's veterans.



Statement of
The American Legion

1608 K STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006

by

RODNEY S. KIRK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

MAY 26, 1988

STATEMENT OF RODNEY S. KIRK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MAY 26, 1988

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Legion appreciates this opportunity to appear before this distinguished Subcommittee to express its views on the National Cemetery System, administered by VA's Department of Memorial Affairs.

First however, The American Legion would like to commend this Subcommittee for its vital role in the formulation and passage of H.R. 2616, which contains several program changes within the Department of Memorial Affairs. This extensive piece of legislation responds to several concerns our organization has expressed in recent years concerning DMA's activities, programs and benefits. The immediate and long-range impact of the legislative changes in H.R. 2616 will serve to improve overall services to this nation's veterans.

Madam Chairwoman, it is a documented fact that the demands on the National Cemetery System will significantly increase in the next 3 or 4 decades. Statistics pertaining to the aging veteran population, as well as DMA's past and projected workload statistics, unequivocally confirm this statement. The American Legion is convinced, however, that resources, in the form of money and FTEE, have not kept pace with expanding workloads of this Department.

From 1977 to 1987, DMA's workload for interments and gravesites maintained have gone up approximately 40% and 27% respectively, while supporting employment has increased only eight percent. The American Legion recognizes and commends DMA's ability to do more with less, but at the same time, we are concerned that the quality of maintenance will suffer. If new cemeteries are to be added to the National Cemetery System, it is incumbent on Congress to see that sufficient resources are provided to operate them, and that resources are not taken from existing cemeteries.

The American Legion would like to direct this Subcommittee's attention to Chapter 9 of VA's Report on the National Cemetery System, entitled: "Plans for Meeting Veterans' Future Burial Needs." The first paragraph states: "Projected increases in demand for burial in national cemeteries, coupled with progressive closures of now open national cemeteries, make it extremely important to develop long-range plans for meeting veterans' future burial needs." Following this, a five point plan was proposed by DMA.

Our concern focuses on point number five, wherein it is proposed that VA will "establish policy related to the future physical development of the National Cemetery System", based upon the fact that the present policy for expansion of the National Cemetery System (regional concept) culminated with the opening of the Fort Mitchell National Cemetery. To our knowledge, this policy has not yet been decided. The American Legion is of the opinion that any further delays concerning this proposed policy will severely impact on VA's ability to meet the future burial needs of veterans, especially within those ten geographic areas identified in the report. We would urge this Subcommittee to ascertain the current status of this policy, and to provide continued oversight until its release.

We would like to briefly discuss the need for VA to proceed expeditiously with Environmental Impact Studies (EISs), especially in the Seattle/Tacoma area, Cleveland, Albany, and Chicago. These EISs equate to the first step toward ensuring the burial needs for veterans in these areas are met in a timely manner.

We note that recent legislative changes outlined in H.R. 2616, will expand DMA's authority to utilize graveliners in those national cemeteries where the need has been documented. As this Subcommittee well knows, the use of graveliners in private cemeteries is commonplace, and oftentimes a requirement. The use of graveliners better protects the casket and remains, drastically reduces maintenance costs and efforts, and greatly improves the overall appearance of the cemetery, mainly by stabilizing the headstones and preventing the ground from sinking over a collapsing casket. We would encourage the Administrator to fully exercise the authority outlined in that provision of the law, and to do so as soon as possible.

The American Legion feels compelled to reiterate our concerns regarding the provision of PL 99-576 pertaining to the mandatory use of upright grave markers, with noted exceptions. We continue to feel that the exception should have been made for those national cemeteries that have always utilized flat grave markers since their construction. Although H.R. 2616 specifically excluded some of these, the issue is still a valid concern for the remainder, and we would urge this Subcommittee to examine a possible solution to this situation.

We would like to encourage continued automation efforts within the Department of Memorial Affairs. Improvements have been noted in terms of timeliness and tracking abilities within the headstone and marker program since computerization abilities have been expanded. The size, scope and sensitivity of DMA's overall mission demands that

- 3 -

continued computerization enhancement remains a high priority of the Department.

In conclusion Madam Chairwoman, we would like to add that the vast array of issues involving burial benefits continue to remain a high priority of our membership. Each year, Delegates to our National Convention consider many resolutions which emanate from various Departments of the Legion, pertaining to burial benefits and other issues related to the National Cemetery System. We are sure that this year will be no exception, as we develop this organization's policies for the 101st Congress. As usual, we will provide this Subcommittee with copies of these resolutions, and pledge our assistance toward reaching their ultimate goals.

Madam Chairwoman, that concludes our statement. We will be happy to respond to any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.

STATEMENT OF

DENNIS M. CULLINAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION CEMETERY SYSTEM

WASHINGTON, D. C.

MAY 26, 1988

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the privilege of presenting to this distinguished Subcommittee the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States with respect to the National Cemetery System as administered by the Department of Memorial Affairs of the Veterans Administration.

Madam Chairwoman, the very rapidly aging veteran population is not only providing a challenge to the VA's health care system but will also have a severe impact on the Department of Memorial Affairs' ability to provide for a veteran's burial in a national cemetery. By 1990 veterans over the age of 65 will make up more than a quarter of the population and by 2000 the percentage will be in excess of one-third. This rapid aging of the veteran population will continue until 2010 when it's expected to exceed 12 million. Inasmuch as interment in a national cemetery is available to all veterans discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, the crucial planning and timely implementation to expand and/or better utilize existing resources and programs must be aggressively pursued so veterans will not be denied burial in a national cemetery within a reasonable distance from their survivors.

As you know, the National Cemetery System began during the Civil War when the need was perceived to provide burial grounds on or near the many battlefields for the soldiers who fell in battle or died in field hospitals and prisoner-of-war stockades. The initial legislation that led to the establishment of what was to become the National Cemetery System was enacted on July 17, 1862. Through this legislation, 12 cemeteries became the property--and the responsibility--of the Federal Government. By 1870 there were 62 such cemeteries. On September 1, 1973, Public Law 92-43 transferred 82 national cemeteries to the VA and created an organizational structure to manage them. The 21 cemeteries operated by the Department of Medicine and Surgery were added to these 82, creating the National Cemetery System consisting of 103 cemeteries. There are now 110 national cemeteries in operation, with two more under construction and one in the planning stage.

For a number of years the VFW has been mandated by resolution to seek the establishment of an open national cemetery in every state. Because a great number of national cemeteries are closed, the survivors of eligible veterans are forced either to seek the veteran's interment far from home or through other sources, generally at greater expense. We believe that providing an open national cemetery in every state is the responsibility of the Federal Government inasmuch as veterans were inducted into military service by that government.

As stated previously, the VA will be severely challenged in the near future to provide burial space to eligible veterans. In responding to this challenge, the VA established one large national cemetery in each of the ten Standard Federal Regions plus one near Washington, D. C. While the VA must be commended for taking action to address the ever increasing demand, we do not believe the regional cemetery's objective has been successful. Again, the survivors of veterans should not be required to travel great distances particularly at this most grievous period. It is our understanding the VA is also in the process of establishing one national cemetery in each of the ten most populated cities in the United States. We believe this action will certainly help reduce the burden

Page 2

on the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs and at the same time, provide an open national cemetery in close proximity to the greatest number of veterans.

Madam Chairwoman, at this time, I would like to address another program which the VFW wholeheartedly supports--the State Cemetery Grants program. This program, enacted in 1978, authorized the Administrator to provide a matching fund, grant-in-aid program for establishing, expanding, or improving veterans' cemeteries owned and operated by the State. The law, Public Law 95-476, allows grants in an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the total value of the land and the cost of improvements with the remaining amount to be contributed by the State. We firmly believe this program complements the National Cemetery System by permitting a veteran to be buried with his comrades-in-arms in his home State when there is no national cemetery available. We support this program and would encourage the individual states to take advantage of it. We would also strongly support legislation to extend this valuable program inasmuch as it is due to expire at the end of FY 1989.

Finally Madam Chairwoman, the voting delegates to our most recent National Convention also passed several resolutions addressing the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs. The VFW supports restoring the burial allowance for all wartime veterans, making the plot allowance available to all veterans and increasing the plot allowance from \$150 to \$250. Copies of these resolutions are appended to my statement.

This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

STATEMENT BY

RAYMOND J. COSTANZO

SUPERINTENDENT

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING

AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECOND SESSION, 100TH CONGRESS

26 MAY 1988

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

Madam Chairwoman, Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, I am Raymond J. Costanzo, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, and am appearing on behalf of the Secretary of the Army who is responsible for the operation of Arlington National Cemetery. I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to give you a general status report on the operation of Arlington National Cemetery.

On the Virginia side of the Potomac River across from Washington, D.C. lies Arlington National Cemetery, the burial place of many great Americans and a revered shrine to America's war dead.

The cemetery was originally part of a 6,000 acre tract granted in 1669 by the Governor of Virginia to a ship's captain, Robert Howsing, in payment for transporting settlers to the New World. Howsing soon sold his acres, reportedly for six hogsheads of tobacco, to one John Alexander, whose family held the land until 1778. At that time, John Parke Custis, son of Martha Washington by her first marriage, bought 1,100 acres--the land which now comprises Arlington Cemetery and the Fort Myer Military Reservation. From that day on, the land would be associated with names famous in American history.

John Parke Custis died of illness during the siege of Yorktown in 1781, while serving as an Aide to George Washington. The future first President then adopted two of Custis' four children, Eleanor and George Washington Parke Custis, and took them to live at Mount Vernon. The boy became devoted to his stepfather and when the Custis estate passed into his hands he made it part of his effort to perpetuate Washington's memory. After first naming the property "Mount Washington," he built a mansion suited to house his mementos of "The Father of Our Country." The mansion was renamed "Arlington House" after the Custis family's original property on Virginia's Eastern Shore acquired by grant from the Earl of Arlington.

George Washington Parke Custis and his wife had four children. Only one lived to maturity: Mary Ann Randolph Custis, born in 1808. In 1831, she married Lieutenant Robert E. Lee, a childhood friend and recent West Point graduate. The Lees, being a military family, traveled much but the house and land at Arlington always remained their home. Title was to pass to her eldest son, George Washington Custis Lee, upon her death. Then, however, the Civil War intervened and the future of Arlington, like so much else, was changed.

Robert Edward Lee returned to Arlington for the last time on April 18, 1861, four days after the firing on Fort Sumter. He had refused to take command of the federal armies being marshalled to crush the revolt. On April 20 he resigned his commission from the United States Army, stating that "Save in the defense of my native State, I never again desire to draw my sword." Soon after, the Lees left Arlington forever, having dispatched as much as possible of the family pictures, silver, and furniture to a safe place.

The former home of the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia soon became a Union Army headquarters and fortifications were erected on its high ground. Forts Whipple and McPherson were the first military installations set up on the Arlington land. They were succeeded by the present day Fort Myer.

The U.S. Government took possession of Arlington under an 1862 "Act for the Collection of Direct Taxes in the Insurrectionary Districts within the United States." Mrs. Lee, who was living within the Confederate lines, attempted to pay the taxes of \$92.07 plus penalties through an agent. The payment was refused on the grounds that Mrs. Lee had to make it in person. On January 11, 1864, the tax commissioners bid in the estate to the Federal Government at an evaluation of \$26,800 "for Government use, for war, military, charitable, and educational purposes."

On July 17, 1862, President Lincoln approved an omnibus bill Section 18 of which provided that "The President of the United States shall have power, whenever in his opinion it shall be expedient, to purchase cemetery grounds and cause them to be securely enclosed to be used as a national cemetery for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country." Burial grounds were established that year in Alexandria, Virginia, and on the ground of the Soldiers' Home in Washington itself. Thus Arlington was not the first national cemetery, though it would become the best known.

Burial space at Alexandria and the Soldiers' Home quickly became scarce. On June 15, 1864, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton formally designated Arlington House and 200 surrounding acres as a military cemetery. The Army Quartermaster General, Brigadier General Montgomery C. Meigs, was charged with creating and administering the new facility. Arlington would remain under the Quartermaster General's jurisdiction until the abolition of that office in the 1960's.

The first military burial in Arlington took place on May 13, 1864--a month before Secretary Stanton's Order--when Private William Christman, Company G, 67th Pennsylvania Infantry, was interred. Those buried immediately thereafter were principally soldiers who died in Washington and Alexandria hospitals during the war. Subsequently the remains of Union soldiers were gathered from the battlefields of Bull Run, Bristol Station, Chantilly, and Aldie, Virginia; from abandoned cemeteries in the District of Columbia; from other points within a 40-mile radius of Washington; and from the military post cemetery at Point Lookout, Maryland. There were some wartime interments of Confederate dead but most of the more than 500 Confederates now buried in Arlington were veterans who died in the Washington area after the conflict was over. Many former Southern soldiers are grouped around a Confederate monument erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1914. It is the work of Sir Moses Ezekiel, a well known sculptor who served within the Southern forces in his youth. He is buried at the foot of the monument.

The grave of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, engineer, artist, and soldier, lies in front of Arlington House and overlooks the Federal City he designed. It is marked by a table like monument provided for by Congress. South of the Arlington House a massive granite sarcophagus stands over a vault containing the remains of 2,111 dead recovered from the battlefields at Bull Run and the route to the Rappahanock. The Confederate Monument, mentioned earlier, is on the west side of the Cemetery, in Jackson Circle.

The Maine Memorial is on Sigsbee Drive. By Act of Congress dated May 9, 1910, the mast of the USS Maine was raised from Havana Harbor and brought to Arlington to honor those who lost their lives in the disastrous explosion and sinking which touched off the Spanish-American War. There are 229 crewmen buried in the surrounding section, 167 unknown and 62 known. The names of all those killed are inscribed on the Memorial. In the vault at the base of the Memorial rest, temporarily, the remains of Ignace Jan Paderewski, Polish patriot and musician. Paderewski died in New York City in 1941 while his country was under Nazi occupation. President Roosevelt stipulated that he could lie at Arlington "until Poland is free." The perpetuation of Communist rule in his native land has caused Paderewski's temporary rest at Arlington to be a long one.

Three other monuments honor Spanish-American War dead at other locations in the Cemetery; a Spanish War Monument dedicated to all soldiers and sailors who died in that war; a Spanish War Nurses Monument; and a monument to Teddy Roosevelt's famed Rough Riders. Other memorials of interest include: the Canadian Cross of Sacrifice, erected by the Canadian Government in honor of U.S. citizens who lost their lives serving in the Canadian Armed Forces during the World Wars or Korea; the Argonne Cross, erected by the Argonne Unit, American Women's Legion in memory of the World War I dead; and a Chaplains Memorial erected by World War I chaplains in memory of 23 comrades who died in that conflict.

Recent monument dedications include a memorial to the eight American Servicemen who died attempting to free the American Hostages held in Iran in April, 1980; and a memorial to the seven crew members of the Space Shuttle Challenger who lost their lives in the tragic explosion of the shuttle in January, 1986. A flagpole near the Memorial Amphitheater is dedicated to the memory of Commander Maxwell Woodhull, USN, and his son Brevet Brigadier General Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull, in accordance with General Woodhull's will. It supplements the Cemetery's principal flagpole near the Arlington House.

Preeminent among Arlington's many memorials are the Memorial Amphitheater, and on its plaza, the Tomb Area. Largely through the influence of the Grand Army of the Republic, Congress authorized construction of the Amphitheater in 1908. Funds were appropriated in 1913 and President Woodrow Wilson laid the cornerstone in 1915. Construction was completed on June 30, 1919, and a final dedication took place on May 15, 1920. The Amphitheater, an imposing white marble structure of classic design, occupies 1-1/2 acres and is enclosed by a marble colonnade with entrances at the east and west ends of its principal axes. The west entrance gives the public access to seating within the Amphitheater for ceremonies and other events. At the east entrance there is an outdoor stage. Behind the stage, within the Amphitheater itself, are display rooms at the main and second floor levels and a chapel in the basement. The latest major addition to the main level display room, which also serves as a reception area for visiting dignitaries, is a plaque dedicated by President Carter dedicated to all who served in the Vietnam Era.

The Tomb Area is of course one of the principal attractions for the more than 4 million visitors who come to Arlington each year. Placing of wreaths at the Tomb by foreign dignitaries and representatives of schools, civic, and fraternal organizations have become familiar occurrences. The first Unknown, a soldier from World War I, was laid to rest on the Plaza of the Amphitheater during ceremonies presided over by President Warren Harding on Armistice Day, November 11, 1921. A sarcophagus of pure white Colorado marble was erected over the grave in 1932. It bears the inscription:

HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD

To the left of the Tomb Area, a white marble slab marked 1950-1953 indicates the resting place of an Unknown American Serviceman of the Korean Conflict. To the right, a similar marble slab with the numerals 1941-1945 lies over the grave of an Unknown from World War II. The Unknowns of World War II and the Korean Conflict were interred on Memorial Day, 1958, during impressive ceremonies presided over by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon. A marble slab inscribed with the dates 1958-1975, centered between the crypts of the World War II and Korean Unknowns, marks the grave of the Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era. President Ronald Reagan presided over the funeral services for the Vietnam Unknown on Memorial Day, May 28, 1984.

More than 207,000 former service members and their spouses and children are buried in Arlington. The dead from all of America's wars are represented. Many who achieved personal distinction, whether in the military or civilian life, have found a final resting place there. Major military figures of the nineteenth century include: Montgomery C. Meigs, the Quartermaster General who first had jurisdiction over the cemetery; General "Fighting Phil" Sheridan; General George Crook; Major General Leonard Wood; and Admirals David D. Porter and William T. Sampson. Others whose reputations in American history are most attributable to their civilian careers are also interred at Arlington. Among these are Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.; Colonel William Jennings Bryan; and Captain Robert Todd Lincoln, son of the martyred President.

Major figures of the 20th century include Admiral Robert E. Peary; Major Walter Reed; General of the Armies John J. Pershing; Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd; and a host of names familiar to all with knowledge of World War II. General of the Air Force Henry H. (Hap) Arnold; General of the Army George C. Marshall; General of the Army Omar N. Bradley; General Jacob L. Devers; Lieutenant General Claire Chennault; USAF: General Jonathan M. Wainwright; Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr.; and Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy.

The most decorated soldier of World War II, Major Audie Murphy, is also buried at Arlington. Major John Foster Dulles; Lieutenant James V. Forrestal, USNR; and astronauts Lieutenant Commander Virgil I. Grissom, USAF; and Lieutenant Commander Roger B. Chaffee, USN, victims of an Apollo training fire in 1967, and Lieutenant Colonel Francis R. (Dick) Scobee, USAF, and Captain Michael J. Smith, USN, crew members of the Space Shuttle Challenger, are among those interred there as well. General Daniel (Chappie) James, Jr., the first black General Officer in the Air Force, three former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Nathan Twining, USAF, General George S. Brown, USAF, and General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA, and Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the Nuclear Navy, have been more recently laid to rest. Supreme Court Justices William O. Douglas, a Private during World War I, and Potter Stewart, a Lieutenant in the Navy during the second World War, have joined four other Supreme Court Justices buried at Arlington. Former Heavyweight Boxing Champion Joe Louis, an Army veteran of World War II, was buried at Arlington in April 1981. Matthew Henson, Co-Discoverer of the North Pole, was laid to rest in Arlington in April 1988.

In recent years, Arlington has become the final resting place for American citizens who have been made the victims of acts of terrorism throughout the world. Twenty-one members of the United States Marine Corps, killed in the bombing of the Marine Compound in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983, are buried at Arlington. Seven victims of the terrorist bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983 are also buried in the cemetery. Navy Seabee Robert D. Stethem, murdered by hijackers of a TWA jetliner in June, 1985, and 24 soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, killed in a aircraft accident in Gander, New Foundland, also rest in Arlington. Three sailors killed during the unprovoked Iraqi attack on the USS STARK also rest in Arlington.

Arlington National Cemetery is also the burial place of two Presidents of the United States. As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, any President is eligible for burial in Arlington, whether or not he has had any previous military service.

William Howard Taft, 27th President of the United States and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was buried on March 11, 1930. Mrs. Taft was interred beside him on May 25, 1943. Before her death, she arranged for her husband's grave to be marked with a monument designed by the sculptor James E. Fraser. The Commission of Fine Arts and the War Department approved the design.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President and a Navy Lieutenant in World War II, was buried in a special lot in Section 45 of Arlington National Cemetery on November 25, 1963, three days after his assassination in Dallas, Texas. While President, Mr. Kennedy visited Arlington on several occasions. His last visit was on Veterans Day 1963, just 11 days before his assassination, when he placed a wreath at the Tomb Area. On an earlier visit, he stood before the Custis-Lee Mansion and commenting on the beauty and serenity of the scene before him, remarked, "I could stay here forever." His grave is some 300 feet down the terrace from the Mansion. It is in direct line with the Memorial Bridge spanning the Potomac and the Lincoln Memorial on the Washington side of the bridge.

Mr. John C. Warnecki, a distinguished architect and a member of the Commission of Fine Arts, designed the President's permanent memorial and gravesite. Construction began in September 1965. The remains of the President and the two infant Kennedy children were interred in the permanent site on the evening of March 14, 1967. Boston's Cardinal Cushing blessed the gravesite the following day.

Construction and other expenses in the immediate area of the gravesite were paid for by the Kennedy family. The Government paid for the construction of roadways, approaches, and walks leading to the site. Since 1963, millions of Americans and others have visited the President's grave, which with the Tomb Area, is a principal attraction for those who visit Arlington.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the slain President, was buried in Section 45 after graveside services were conducted for him on the evening of June 8, 1968. Senator Kennedy was assassinated on June 6 after victory in the California Democratic Presidential Primary. As a United States Senator with prior military service in the Navy during World War II, Mr. Kennedy was eligible for burial in Arlington in his own right.

For the millions who visit Arlington, as for all Americans, the cemetery is a national shrine. For this reason every effort is made to insure Arlington is maintained in a condition commensurate with its prestige and inspirational importance. Recent years have seen the development and integration of an expanded 612-acre Arlington, with improved landscaping of older areas, and preparation of new sections complete with trees, shrubs, turf, and watering facilities. Both the Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb Area have been refurbished, and a new Administration building has been erected. Most recently, two phases of a Columbarium for the inurnment of cremated remains have been completed. This Columbarium is the only one of such magnitude and the only one in a national cemetery. It is open to all honorably discharged veterans, their spouses, and dependent children. Eventually, there will be 50,000 niches for cremated remains.

Construction of a new Visitors Center and parking facility began in late 1986. These new facilities, much needed to better serve the visiting public and at the same time, reducing interference with funeral services, are scheduled for completion in the fall of 1988.

With the opening of this new facility, a paid-parking system will be initiated. Under this plan, all visitors utilizing the parking facility will be charged a nominal parking fee. All funds received from this operation will be returned to the United States Treasury to pay back the cost of construction. Friends and relatives desiring to visit their loved ones gravesite will not be required to pay any fees.

Since 1967, following a great increase in the demand for gravesites after the interment of President Kennedy, eligibility for ground burial in Arlington has been restricted to a relatively small portion of those who have served in the Armed Forces, their spouses and minor or dependent children. The purpose of these restrictions is to keep Arlington an active cemetery for as long as possible. At the present rate of burial, approximately 16 daily, Monday thru Friday, it is projected that the cemetery will not be filled until the year 2020.

At the close of fiscal year 1987, the remains of 206,065 persons were interred/inurned in Arlington National Cemetery. Of this total, 199,025 persons were interred and 7,040 remains inurned in the Columbarium in Arlington National Cemetery. In fiscal year 1987 services were conducted for 3,997 persons, which included 83 General and Flag Officers. In fiscal year 1988 and 1989, burials and inurnments are projected to be 4,320 and 4,470 respectively. Approximately 16 interments are accomplished daily.

The second 5,000 niche unit of the Columbarium was opened in April 1986, to accommodate inurnment of cremated remains of honorably discharged veterans not otherwise eligible for burial at Arlington. Design funds for the next 10,000 niche increment were requested in fiscal year 1988, construction funds have been requested for fiscal year 1989.

In addition to its principal function as a national cemetery, Arlington is the site of many nonfuneral ceremonies each year. In fiscal year 1987, 2,163 such ceremonies were conducted. A like number of ceremonies is anticipated for fiscal years 1988 and 1989. Arlington National Cemetery has approximately 4 million visitors annually, and is one of the most visited sites in the National Capitol Region.

Madam Chairwoman, this concludes my remarks, and I will be pleased to respond to your questions at this time.

NATIONAL CONCRETE BURIAL VAULT
ASSN.'S POSITION SUMMARY
REGARDING OUTER-BURIAL RECEPTACLES
IN NATIONAL CEMETERY
SYSTEM

Committee On Veterans' Affairs
Hearing - Marcy Kaptur, Chairwoman

May 26, 1988

1. To enlighten and recommend the required use of outer-interment receptacles for all interments within the National Cemetery Systems for the following reasons:
 - A. Fiscal
 - B. Ongoing maintenance
 - C. Continued beautification of cemeteries
 - D. Safety (potential liability)
 - E. Dignity (disinterments/relocation under Public Law, 99-576)
 - F. Health considerations
2. In light of the fact that "GRAVELINERS and BURIAL VAULTS" are not defined as a VETERANS BENEFIT by Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Systems (even with the three National Cemeteries operating under government GRAVELINER contracts) - - and because of potential VA budgetary constraints and adverse tax payer reaction, the National Concrete Burial Vault Association recommends the following:
 - A. The Veterans Administration issue a mandate requiring the use of outer-interment receptacles in all National Cemeteries .
 - B. The selection, purchase and providing of burial vaults or graveliners be the responsibility of NEXT-OF-KIN vis-a-vis the private sector, which is commensurate with the traditional process that exists nationwide i.e. "family-funeral director - manufacturer relationship"

3. If the VA determines that Veterans/eligible dependents must be provided a "government furnished graveliner" at no cost to recipients, NCBVA submits that this is simply a carbon of the 1975-80 government furnished graveliner program that was cancelled by the OMB in 1980 because of the high capital costs to the Memorial Affairs. Further, we deem government graveliner contracts as being contrary to the laissez faire i.e. consumer-funeral establishment - - vault manufacturer.

Albeit the NCBVA urges the adoption of a mandatory outer-burial receptacle regulation for all National Cemeteries and that source and selection of burial receptacles be the responsibility of next-of-kin (as is the custom in over 90% of America's private sector cemeteries), NCBVA submits the following alternative if Memorial Affairs deems it necessary to provide some type of fiscal assistance in the graveliner procurement: In view of the fact that approximately 400,000 Veterans are dying annually and of this number an estimated 50,000 are being interred in National Cemeteries (20% dependents and 17% cremation), it is obvious that 88% of Veterans' burials are in private sector cemeteries.

Therefore, in order to achieve a policy which would be equitable and beneficial to all concerned (especially the 88% who do not use the National Cemetery System) NCBVA recommends that the Veterans burial allowance be increased (with outer-burial receptacle sum designated) which would cover the average retail cost of a minimum grave receptacle or may be used to apply to or defray the retail cost of any other type of burial vault or interment receptacle to be selected by the next-of-kin from the funeral establishment of choice.

4. If, for whatever reasons, the Memorial Affairs do not issue an outer-interment receptacle requirement for National Cemeteries, it is strongly recommended that a specific recommendation and position of preference statement be issued as part of National Cemetery procedures, rules and regulations which would underscore the positive aspects of outer-enclosure use to the consumer.

JJB



AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
Three Skyline Place, Suite 1111, 5201 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041 • (703) 379-5838

Testimony of

James E. Watkins, Jr.

American Cemetery Association

Before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

With Respect to

The National Cemetery System and Related Burial Benefits

May 26, 1988

Chairwoman Kaptur and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is James E. Watkins, Jr. and I am here today on behalf of the American Cemetery Association. I am a past president of the American Cemetery Association and a past president of the Indiana State Cemetery Association. Besides being a second-generation cemeterian, I served with the Strategic Air Command as navigator and separated with the rank of Captain. I am also a member of the American Legion.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify and request that the complete text of our written testimony be made part of the record of today's hearing. At the conclusion of my testimony, I will be glad to answer any questions from you and the Subcommittee members.

The American Cemetery Association (ACA) is a national trade association which represents approximately 2,300 members including municipal, religious, and private cemeteries. The ACA respectfully submits its views on the potential expansion of the National Cemetery System and related burial benefits.

Cost of Veterans' Cemeteries Escalating

All cemeteries, regardless of whether they are operated by private, government or religious interests, share one common problem: constantly rising maintenance expenses involving gravesites and markers, road repairs, water and drainage systems, and related administrative activities. These costs will continue to escalate in future years due to increased labor expenses, equipment replacement and the uncertain effects of future inflation.

There is a critical difference, however, in the way non-governmental cemeteries meet these expenses compared to veterans cemeteries. Forty-seven states require endowment care trusts whereby cemeteries deposit into an irrevocable trust a percentage of the sales price of each lot, usually a minimum of ten percent, the income of which is used to pay future maintenance costs. This requirement also prevents private cemeteries from eventually

becoming, in effect, wards of the state.

By contrast, the National Cemetery System has no such trust fund and must rely solely on outlays of Federal tax dollars each year, indefinitely, to meet these continually rising expenses. An expanded Federal cemetery system only increases this problem.

For example, the preliminary VA minor construction program for cemeteries in the proposed 1989 budget highlights this problem. The program accounts for maintenance projects in only 28 of the National Cemetery System's 112 cemeteries, yet the budget totals \$5.8 million. The specific projects, however, are typical of the expenses faced by all cemeteries. One national cemetery needs a quarter of a million dollars just to seal its asphalt roads; another requires an equal amount for concrete road repairs, while a third will need \$700,000 for more road and curb repairs. As cemeteries age, their maintenance costs increase, similar to other physical plants and equipment, whether or not they are open or closed to future interments.

The ACA urges Congress to direct the appropriate Federal agencies, including the General Accounting Office, to conduct an intensive and comprehensive study in order to determine once and for all the actual price tag for running the world's largest cemetery system. Without this information, Congress is deprived of the means of making intelligent decisions respecting the circumstances under which additional cemeteries can and should be constructed.

The Problem of Inconsistent Burial Benefit Policies

According to Veterans Administration figures, less than 15 percent of veterans eligible for burial benefits choose national cemetery interment at the time of death. While the construction of additional VA cemeteries would undoubtedly increase this percentage, the Veterans Administration itself has long recognized the impracticality of constructing and maintaining cemeteries within 50 miles of major veteran population centers, the historic

radius beyond which national cemetery use significantly declines as in the private sector.

In addition, when the National Cemetery System was transferred to the VA in 1973, Congress recognized that these cemeteries did not exist in a vacuum but were meant to work in conjunction with cemeteries already existing in the private, municipal and religious sectors. By creating alternate forms of burial benefits, such as the burial and plot allowances, Congress sought to encourage veterans and their families to use these resources as their preferences indicated. These burial benefits also served to relieve the burial caseload in the national cemeteries. The critical difference here is that the burial allowance is a one-time payment by the Federal Government whereas interment in a national cemetery creates a continuing financial obligation by the Federal Government to maintain each gravesite forever.

For example, present law restricts the burial allowance to those veterans receiving VA compensation or pensions, or who died as a result of a service-connected disability. Interment in national cemeteries, however, is available to all honorably-discharged veterans. Thus, the most cost-effective of burial benefits, the burial allowance, is the most restrictive in terms of eligibility while the most expensive benefit, interment in a national cemetery, is the most liberal. The ACA proposes that by sensibly enlarging the eligibility and value of the burial and plot allowances, grave inventory in the national cemeteries will be preserved well beyond the current projected figures. A policy of coordinating burial benefits consistent with their original objectives will reduce the number of interments in national cemeteries, resulting in a significant reduction in maintenance expenses for future years.

State Veterans Cemeteries Becoming Financial Burdens

VA officials have testified that the State Cemetery Grant

Program has not been as popular as anticipated due to the concern in various states with the financial burden of ongoing maintenance costs. After being awarded VA funds to establish state cemeteries, many states are directly dependent upon more Federal assistance for the continued operations of these cemeteries. Unlike the care trusts required by most states for private cemeteries, the state veterans cemeteries rely on outlays of tax dollars similar to the Federal Government.

Recently, Congress passed H.R. 2616 which removed the percentage cap on the amount of the VA state cemetery grants, and also authorized the VA to assume responsibility for the Arizona state veterans cemetery. Thus, Congress provided increased incentives for the states to construct their own cemeteries while setting a precedent for the Federal Government to assume responsibility for these same cemeteries later on. The ACA believes that the mechanism for the ultimate failure of the state cemetery program has been set into motion.

Therefore, in addition to the significant yet undocumented costs in maintaining the National Cemetery System forever, the contingent liability facing the Federal Government from the state veterans cemeteries has been totally neglected. The ACA proposes that in view of the tremendous ongoing federal deficits facing the nation, a comprehensive review of the Government's financial liability with regard to national and state cemetery obligations must be performed prior to any future expansion of the National Cemetery System.

Finally, the ACA proposes that Congress, in conjunction with the President, appoint a blue ribbon commission of government and industry experts to make recommendations regarding the future of the National Cemetery System including its cost structure. The ACA would be pleased to participate in such a commission and to contribute the expertise of our industry leaders for the benefit of veterans, the Government, and the taxpayers. Thank you.

FACT SHEET

Summary of Position Paper on Expansion of Veterans Cemeteries, prepared by Monument Builders of North America, 1612 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201

Background

National Cemeteries established 1862; consolidated under VA, 1973.

1974 National Cemetery Study expanded system with 11 new regional cemeteries.

State Grants Program, extended five years, provides matching 50-50 grants to states for veterans cemeteries.

VA recently established two new national cemeteries (Alaska and Florida).

Current Status

109 operative veterans cemeteries: 51 currently closed (but many will be reopened for interment of cremated ashes).

Remaining 59 have ample gravesite resources.

VA admits many veterans cemeteries underused (including several of the new regional ones) because they lie more than 50 miles from veterans' homes. This is used by VA as argument for establishing still more veterans cemeteries and locating them closer to "population centers."

MBNA Position

Government is in direct competition with private sector in providing both burial space and memorialization.

More veterans cemeteries are not needed; existing ones have ample space.

It is obviously impossible to locate veterans cemeteries within 50 miles of a majority of veterans; no matter what yardstick is used to determine "population centers," many veterans will still live outside the 50 mile limit for maximum use.

1984 burial figures show that only 13.8% of veterans chose veterans cemeteries, while 86.2% of veterans preferred a non-veteran cemetery. It is not reasonable to expand the veterans cemetery program to serve the needs of a small minority of veterans.

VA is seeking to expand a program now for which there will be greatly diminished need after year 2000. Veterans deaths will peak in next 15-25 years, and current facilities are ample to meet those needs.

Once cemeteries are built, their maintenance costs continue forever, whether they are used or not, filled or half empty. The cost to the taxpayers, like the care, will go on in perpetuity!

POSITION PAPER ON EXPANSION OF VETERANS CEMETERIES

Prepared by Monument Builders of North America, 1612 Central Street,
Evanston, IL 60201 Telephone: A.C. 312/869-2031
Contact: John E. Dianis, Executive Vice President

Background

National Cemeteries, established originally in 1862, were located on battlefield sites for practical reasons. The concept has progressively expanded over 120-plus years to include burials of spouses and dependent children, nationwide distribution of cemeteries, and regional facilities. Now, consideration is being given for additional expansion of the national cemetery system.

The National Cemetery Act of 1973 (PL 93-43) consolidated the national cemeteries and placed them all under the administration of the Veterans Administration.

A 1974 National Cemetery Study recommended establishment of a large national cemetery in each of 10 federal districts plus the District of Columbia.

In 1983, the Department of Memorial Affairs of the Veterans Administration achieved regional objectives outlined in the 1974 Study. Eleven cemeteries are open.

In addition, the National Cemetery Study of 1974 called for a State Cemetery Grants program to complement the regional cemeteries. The Veterans Administration makes grants to states on a matching 50-50 basis to assist the states in establishing, enlarging, or improving state veterans cemeteries. This grants program has been extended another five years (PL 98-233).

Also, the Veterans Administration has established two new national cemeteries: at Ft. Richardson, Alaska, and in central Florida.

Current Status--Use of Veterans Cemeteries

Of 109 operative veterans cemeteries, 51 are currently closed. Some may be reopened for interment of cremation ashes.

"Remaining 58 have ample gravesite resources . . . they are not appropriately located or distributed to effectively meet veterans' present or future burial needs. We are at a crossroads where we must determine the direction of future expansion."-- excerpts from Opening Statement made by Congressman Richard C. Shelby, Chairman, Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs, at 10/2/84 Hearing. (Note: underline by MBNA for emphasis.)

The argument for additional (new) veterans cemeteries made by the Veterans Administration (see testimony by Paul T. Bannai, former Chief Memorial Affairs Director), is based upon the VA's experience that existing

veterans cemeteries are underused when located more than 50 miles from the veteran's home. Examples given by Mr. Bannai include the new regional cemetery in Pennsylvania, which is 100+ miles from Pittsburgh and from Philadelphia, and too far from either metropolitan area to attract burials. Another example given by Mr. Bannai is the new regional cemetery in Massachusetts, located on Cape Cod some 60-70 miles from Boston -- also apparently "too far" from the city to attract burials.

The VA now wants more cemeteries, presumably to serve the needs of veterans, and suggests that they now be located closer to population centers, presumably to serve the greatest majority.

MBNA Position on Need for More and Expanded Veterans Cemeteries

While on the surface Mr. Bannai's arguments seem reasonable, a closer examination reveals them to be flawed.

Whose needs are really served by additional veterans' cemeteries?

First, there is ample space in existing veterans cemeteries, if the veteran really wishes to be buried in one.

But, what percentage of veterans avail themselves of this privilege?

From figures supplied by the American Cemetery Association, during FY 83 279,115 veterans and their families chose the VA plot allowance and selected burial in a non-veteran cemetery. Only 44,684 chose the veteran cemetery.

13.8% of veterans chose the veterans cemeteries -- and 86.2% of veterans preferred a non-veteran cemetery.

It is not reasonable to expand the veterans cemetery program to serve the needs of a small minority of veterans.

Although Mr. Bannai would argue that there would be some increase in use of veterans cemeteries if they were located closer to more veterans, it is doubtful that the veterans cemeteries would ever appeal to the majority of veterans and their families.

How close is "close enough"? By the VA's own standard, it should be 50 miles from a population center. How is a population center to be measured? -- 1 million and over? 100,000? And is this criteria really fair to the veteran that the VA purports to want to serve? The service and sacrifice of the veteran from Okmulgee, Oklahoma is every bit as valuable as the veteran from Chicago or New York. Does Okmulgee qualify for a national cemetery?

Since it is obviously impossible to locate veterans cemeteries within 50 miles of all -- or even most -- veterans, and since burial facts indicate that only a small percentage of veterans use existing veterans cemeteries, MBNA questions the need for an expanded national cemetery system.

Since it is not serving the needs of the veterans, whose needs are being served? It would seem that a government agency is more interested in insuring its existence than serving its constituency, whose needs while alive -- for

example, in the health care field -- might be far more urgent than a 4 x 8 foot plot after death.

It would also seem that there is an excessive zeal to locate new cemeteries in various congressional districts to promote the interests of those districts, at national taxpayer expense.

Why is the government in direct competition with the private sector in providing both burial space and memorialization?

The private cemetery industry and the private memorial industry of this country have demonstrated their ability to fully and completely meet the burial needs of the citizens of this country, whether veterans or non-veterans, and at no burden to the taxpayers, be they veterans or non-veterans.

MBNA believes there has been a strong national trend, evidenced in the last two national elections, and shared by both major political parties, to reduce the role of the government vis a vis the private citizen and private business. Even now, there is strong national sentiment for reducing the budget deficits and reducing, in general, government spending on services that the public perceives to be unneeded and unwarranted.

Efforts to expand the national veterans cemetery program fly in the face of national trends, national experience, and national need. The Veterans Administration is looking to expand a program to serve veterans needs for the next 15-25 years, when their own projections indicate that this need will peak -- and then diminish -- after the year 2010. But the costs of maintaining those veterans cemeteries -- the 109 we already have and the undetermined number of new ones which the VA wants -- will not diminish. Those cemeteries must be maintained forever, whether filled or half empty, whether used or not. The cost to the taxpayers will go on, like the care, in perpetuity.

MPNA, with its 1250 members -- independent wholesale and retail monument businesses located throughout the United States -- is unalterably opposed to any further expansion of the national veterans cemetery program.

Monument Builders of North America: A Brief Overview

Monument Builders of North America, with headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, was founded in 1906. Its 1250 members represent the leading retail, wholesale, manufacturing and supply firms of the monument industry. While maintaining a broad range of programs, services and activities for its members, the primary objectives of MBNA have always been twofold: first, to encourage the public's interest, knowledge and appreciation of memorialization; and second, to promote the best interests of the public by supporting freedom of choice in memorialization. To this end, MBNA adopted its Statement of Policy in 1972 setting forth its philosophy for fair competitive practice in the industry; and in 1983 MBNA adopted a Code of Good Practice, outlining a set of business ethics and practices which serve to protect the consumer.

